This is a digital copy of a book that was preserved for generations on library shelves before it was carefully scanned by Google as part of a project to make the world's books discoverable online.

It has survived long enough for the copyright to expire and the book to enter the public domain. A public domain book is one that was never subject to copyright or whose legal copyright term has expired. Whether a book is in the public domain may vary country to country. Public domain books are our gateways to the past, representing a wealth of history, culture and knowledge that's often difficult to discover.

Marks, notations and other marginalia present in the original volume will appear in this file - a reminder of this book's long journey from the publisher to a library and finally to you.

Usage guidelines

Google is proud to partner with libraries to digitize public domain materials and make them widely accessible. Public domain books belong to the public and we are merely their custodians. Nevertheless, this work is expensive, so in order to keep providing this resource, we have taken steps to prevent abuse by commercial parties, including placing technical restrictions on automated querying.

We also ask that you:

+ *Make non-commercial use of the files* We designed Google Book Search for use by individuals, and we request that you use these files for personal, non-commercial purposes.

+ *Refrain from automated querying* Do not send automated queries of any sort to Google's system: If you are conducting research on machine translation, optical character recognition or other areas where access to a large amount of text is helpful, please contact us. We encourage the use of public domain materials for these purposes and may be able to help.

+ *Maintain attribution* The Google "watermark" you see on each file is essential for informing people about this project and helping them find additional materials through Google Book Search. Please do not remove it.

+ *Keep it legal* Whatever your use, remember that you are responsible for ensuring that what you are doing is legal. Do not assume that just because we believe a book is in the public domain for users in the United States, that the work is also in the public domain for users in other countries. Whether a book is still in copyright varies from country to country, and we can't offer guidance on whether any specific use of any specific book is allowed. Please do not assume that a book's appearance in Google Book Search means it can be used in any manner anywhere in the world. Copyright infringement liability can be quite severe.

About Google Book Search

Google's mission is to organize the world's information and to make it universally accessible and useful. Google Book Search helps readers discover the world's books while helping authors and publishers reach new audiences. You can search through the full text of this book on the web at `http://books.google.com/`

WIDENER
HN PEJ4 G

21478.32
*

Harvard College Library

THE GIFT OF

FRIENDS OF THE LIBRARY

THE

CHRONICLES OF WALTHAM.

BY

THE AUTHOR OF "THE SUBALTERN,"

"THE COUNTRY CURATE," &c.

Man is dear to man, the poorest poor
Long for some moments in a weary life
When they can know and feel that they have been
Themselves the fathers, and the dealers out
Of some small blessings; have been kind to such
As needed kindness, for this single cause,
That we have all of us one human heart.

WORDSWORTH.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

LONDON:
RICHARD BENTLEY, NEW BURLINGTON STREET.

1835.

3147 8.32
✓ *

HARVARD COLLEGE LIBRARY
THE GIFT OF
FRIENDS OF THE LIBRARY
Aug 4, 1930
(3 vols)

T

George Robert Lewis

30-167
17-3

ADVERTISEMENT.

NOTHING could be easier than to inform the reading public, that the Narratives interwoven into the following Volumes were discovered by me in an old chest, or compiled by a deceased friend; and that I only attended to his dying request when I sent them to the Press. The time for using such a device has, however, gone by, and I therefore believe that it is best to state frankly and fairly at the outset, that the Tales themselves are to be regarded as nothing more than a vehicle by means of which I

have judged it expedient to describe, partly, scenes that have to a certain extent passed under my own observation, partly my own opinions with reference to points, on which all men will and do form judgments for themselves. Whether my philosophy be sound or otherwise, it is not for me to determine. I believe, however, at least I earnestly hope, that it will not be found to teach any lesson which shall so much as seem, in the most remote degree, to run counter to the duties which the different classes of society owe to one another, and which all owe alike to their country and their God.

There is one more point on which I consider it right to touch. The names introduced into the greater number of these tales are almost all peculiar to East Kent; and as such I have used them. But I beg distinctly to disclaim every thing like an allusion to individuals. Systems and habits of life I wish to describe in the colours that seem to me to be just; but with private feeling or

private character I would never willingly trifle. I do not believe that I shall in any case be suspected of taking an opposite course; but in justice both to myself and to others, I make this declaration in the outset.

October 1*st*. 1835.

THE

FARM OF FORTY ACRES.

THE

FARM OF FORTY ACRES.

CHAPTER I.

PROSPEROUS TIMES.

THERE are not many villages in England, of which the general appearance is more attractive, without in the most remote degree bordering on the romantic, than Waltham in Kent. Planted at the foot of one of those undulating hills in which Kent, above all other southern counties, abounds,—washed on the other side by a clear silver stream, which, pouring its gentle tide through meadows exquisitely green, collects first into a mill-dam, and then, after turning the machinery of the mill itself, passes off in a rapid current towards the sea,—if ever village bore about it an air of perfect innocence

and contentment, Waltham may fairly lay claim to the honourable distinction. It consists of a single street, broad, unpaved, and shaded on either hand by rows of stately trees. This, about the centre, makes a curve, so as to place the fine old church at the base, as it were, of a triangle ; while around it are rich meadows, luxuriant hop-gardens, fields that wave in their appointed season with yellow corn, hedge-rows dividing one parcel of land from another, with here and there a grove, a farmhouse, a gentleman's seat, a cluster of cottages, either scattered loosely over the face of the earth, or gathered into neat hamlets. I do not mean to say that the moralist will not detect even about Waltham symptoms that may be apt to create in his mind uneasy misgivings. There are, for example, more than one or two public-houses in the place. The Red Lion presses too closely upon the Black Dog ; and the Anchor and the Blue Boar stand opposite, in rivalry one to the other. But, to counterbalance these, we find the blacksmith's forge, the carpenter's yard, the butcher's shamble, the grocer's store, the saddler's shop, the baker's oven, and, though last, not least, the tailor's work-shop. In all of these, "from morn to dewy eve," busy hands are plied, ham-

mering, dressing, weighing, chopping, stitching, in order that the labourers by whom the surrounding fields are cultivated may find beside their own doors means of supplying all the wants to which their primitive state of existence is likely to expose them.

After the preceding description of the place, it is scarcely necessary to add, that Waltham is not, nor ever was, what is called a manufacturing village. As will be seen by-and-by, an attempt was once made to render it such, but it failed; and now the only loom of which the place can boast stands in the workhouse; and the only species of fabric which its inhabitants can bring into the market is coarse toweling and hop-bags. For, like the parish of which it is the centre, Waltham is strictly agricultural, all its little internal commerce consisting in the formation and sale of such articles as labouring people, whether farmers or farm-servants, require in the prosecution of their calling. With respect, again, to its society,—that may be described in few words. There is no hospitable manor-house either in the village or immediately contiguous to it. About a mile and a half removed, stands, to be sure, an old Elizabethan mansion; neglected, however, and fall-

ing rapidly to decay; while another abuts upon the church itself, though in a still more ruinous condition. But the former contains only a couple of servants, a gardener and a game-keeper, with their wives and families; while the latter, originally a portion of a convent of Black Friars, has, for these last fifty years, been entirely shut up. The aristocracy of Waltham consists, therefore, of the Rev. Hugh Jacobson, the perpetual curate — an incumbent happy in possessing a professional revenue of ninety pounds a year; a Mr. Holtum, the apothecary, a gentleman quiet in his manners, industrious in his calling, the master of very considerable reading, and a large and harassing practice; of Mr. Dodds, the lessee of the great tithes under Sir Marmaduke Littlebourne, the lay impropriator; and of Mr. Sankey, the principal tenant and steward of Lord Brambling. These, with one or two families besides, which, occupying farmhouses in the immediate vicinity, have been accustomed from time to time to meet over a social cup of tea, and, on great occasions, at dinner, long constituted, and, to a certain extent, still constitute, the select society of Waltham. But the harmony that used to prevail among them is not quite so perfect as it once was.

The first time I visited Waltham was in the year 1798. The war of the French revolution was then at its height; and a horror of French principles, at least in the agricultural districts, seemed for the moment to have borne down all memory of party distinctions. Lord Brambling, by descent a Whig, had just avowed himself of the same way of thinking with Sir Marmaduke Littlebourne, a Tory; and Waltham, of which the property was then pretty equally divided between them, might vie with any parish in the kingdom in demonstrations of loyalty. The consequences of so striking a unanimity of principle and feeling were, as far as a stranger might presume to judge, singularly happy. Landlord and tenant pulled entirely together. Rents, though said to be high, (when were they ever said to be the reverse?) could not be immoderately so, for they were paid cheerfully, and with the most commendable regularity. In like manner, the tithe, though collected in kind, (a practice almost universal when it happens to be in the hands of laymen,) called forth no murmurs. The labourers, constantly engaged and adequately remunerated, were industrious, temperate, and respectful; and the parish church could with difficulty contain the crowds

that frequented it on Sunday. I heard, indeed, that a shoemaker had a short time previously ventured to declare himself a disciple of Tom Paine and an advocate for the 'Rights of Man,' till the village became so hot for him that he was glad to abandon it, after all his customers had abandoned him; but, except in this solitary instance, a disaffected person was not known to have broached his opinions in the place, nor could any sect of dissenters succeed in establishing a meeting-house within a mile of it. In a word, the inhabitants of Waltham might be rude, for the village could not yet boast of any other place of daily instruction for the young people than three or four dames' schools; they might be ignorant, for newspapers were unknown in their tap-rooms; they might be bigoted, for they would not listen to any other religious doctrine than that which the curate inculcated from the pulpit; and they might be slavish, for church and king was their rallying cry: but a happier, because a more contented, and, I may venture to add, a more innocent population was not to be found in any village of the same size within the compass of the four seas.

Time passed; and the war, which was felt

elsewhere as a burthen, seemed but to increase the prosperity of Waltham. Corn rose enormously in price; and stock, and wool, and other produce of agricultural operations, kept pace with it. Of course the landlords raised their rents, and the farmers increased the wages of their people. Yet not a voice was heard to complain, for all classes appeared to thrive in nearly the same ratio; and if they paid more for the necessaries of life than they once did, they had more wherewith to make their purchases. Unfortunately, however, the extreme of success is to the full as dangerous to man's moral existence as its opposite.

The greater landlords, both here and elsewhere, finding that no objections were offered to increased rents, began to change their style of living. They bought up land wherever it was to be purchased, till in the end they had annihilated the race of minor squires, who used once upon a time to connect them with the yeomanry,—being for the most part cadets of their own families. This done, they became every day more and more aristocratic in their habits. Tenants' balls were rarely given; and even the race-course itself, with the county assemblies, all at once began to be neglect-

ed. They slid imperceptibly into the circle which had formerly circumscribed the nobility alone. They added field to field; and their younger sons, instead of being portioned off upon small properties, crowded the ranks of the army and the navy, and became candidates for the best preferments in the church.

Still, there was no positive alienation between them and their inferiors. To be sure, both the squire and the baronet began to think more lightly than he used to do of that which his father and grandfather held in profound reverence. He made no scruple of ejecting the tenant of four or five generations, to make way for a new man, provided the latter offered a larger rent; and multitudes of occupancies, which used to support each its separate family, were thrown into one, because large farmers paid most liberally. But, in spite of these changes, there was, or there seemed to be, at least for a time, a good deal of correct feeling on both sides; for the landlord and tenant always spoke kindly when they chanced to meet, and the latter did not dream, in case of a contested election, to vote against the wishes of the former, for by this time political antipa-

thies had resumed their force. In proportion as the immediate dangers of a revolution wore off, and the arms of England prevailed both by sea and land, the factions of Whig and Tory, which have so long sacrificed their country's best interests to party feeling, resumed their influence, till the only tie which they failed to sever were those of private friendship — men being as yet content to wear their colours on their breasts on fitting occasions, without considering it necessary to wrangle about them when the occasion passed away.

In exact proportion to the change of domestic habits among the untitled aristocracy, was that which occurred in the manners and customs of the tenantry. The old-fashioned smock-frock farmer became every day more and more rare. For a time, indeed, he might be seen jogging towards the market town, either in his tax-cart, with his daughters beside him, the latter being charged with the duty of selling the eggs and poultry, or sitting on his long-backed steed, the fore-horse of the team, himself in front, his frugal and comely dame on a pillion behind. His accustomed seat in the tap-room, likewise, continued to hold him; and he smoked his pipe and drank

his tankard cheerfully with those of his own cast and standing. But by degrees all this wore out. The forty, or sixty-acre farm was wanted to complete a holding such as a substantial and intelligent yeoman might occupy; and Hodge being unceremoniously dismissed, his house was rased to the ground, or became converted into cottages. Then might be seen a very different class of tenants,—spruce, neat, well-dressed, dandy gentlemen; with yellow-top boots, made by the Hoby of the day, and blue coats with bright metal buttons, dashing to market on their bits of blood, or driving their ladies in green gigs, picked out with orange! Who so gay, who so blithe as they? They were England's boast, the very pith and sinews of society; who, selling their corn at five and six pounds a quarter, did not value any man a straw, because they were just as independent as the squire himself. Their fathers, to be sure, had boarded their labourers; their fathers rose early, held the plough, returned at twelve o'clock to their boiled pork and greens and home-brewed beer, went forth again till the evening, and slept soundly all night after a substantial supper and a tumbler of warm punch.

But the new generation, — they would have contemplated such a style of living with horror. They drank their port and sherry at home; at the ordinary, or, at all events, on special occasions, they would join their particular friends in champaign. In the hunting-field moreover they bore off the belle for the excellence of their horses, and their own fearless riding; and as to business, they devolved that upon their bailiffs and head men. They would have as soon thought of grasping a piece of red-hot iron as of handling the stilts of the plough. And when you looked farther, you saw them free of speech, free of action, loose and immoral in their lives, — loud jesters, cockfighters, — fond of their rubber, — jovial companions, — sometimes great men for the ladies; everything, in short, the reverse of what their predecessors had been, except in their loyalty. For I believe that, when prices were high, no class of men could be more devoted to the monarchical principle than the tenantry of England in general, as was evinced by the promptitude with which they took up arms in corps either of volunteer infantry or of yeomanry cavalry. In every other respect, however, they were changed, certainly not for the

better. They came to church, no doubt; but it was to see and to be seen. The parson they held in small estimation, and his discourses in still smaller; and though they paid their compositions freely, it was because money was no object to them, and they knew quite well that they had an excellent bargain of their tithes. And as to their wives and daughters, they played the piano, they embroidered, they read novels, they dressed with great neatness; but the making of butter they left entirely in the hands of the dairy-maid, and the disposal of it to paid agents. Balls, plays, as often as the strollers came to the neighbouring town,—card assemblies at the Lion, and private parties at home or abroad,—to appear to advantage at these was the great end of their existence, which they prosecuted with as much assiduity as similar pursuits were followed by the class above them, with whom, if they could not vie in refinement, they at least established a fierce rivalry in gowns, cloaks, and bonnets.

It is an old remark, but not on that account the less worthy to be repeated, that both the vices and the virtues of society, while they assume a broader character as we go downwards in the scale, are yet in all classes essentially the

same. As the tenantry, taking their cue from the landlords, forsook the customs of their forefathers, so the labouring population made haste to imitate both the careless habits and the easy morals of those whom they served. Dismissed entirely from the farmhouse, they now dwelt in cottages of their own; and, being liberally paid in money, they spent no trifling proportion of it in the alehouse. Meanwhile, as there was ample employment both for women and children,—as fire-wood was freely given, and grist for the pig sold cheap,—as they were encouraged to keep poultry, and not discountenanced from maintaining milch kine,—the families suffered comparatively little from the growing dissipation of the men. Besides, what was the hard-working labourer to do? His beer was a necessary of life to him, and the imposition of a tax upon malt at once put a stop to the practice of brewing at home. He must needs, therefore, find it at the public-house, or not find it at all; for his master held with him very little intercourse except when he paid him his wages on Saturday night. But the public-house, once entered, had attractions about it which never failed to produce a repetition of the visit. Even if he could have had his beer

at home, the only society in drinking it would have been his wife and children; whereas, in the tap-room, there were Tom, and Dick, and Harry, all merry and right good fellows, who told stories and sang songs and caused the night to wear away delightfully. Nor was another strong attraction wanting; for the landlord, aware of the power of music over sensitive minds, had always a minstrel at hands who charmed his guests with such airs, a "Nancy Dawson," and "Black Joke," admirably performed on the fiddle. And when occasions of more than ordinary rejoicing came round, such as a harvest-home, or a wedding, or St. Thomas's day, or Christmas eve, or any other of the festivals which during those prosperous times were not of rare occurrence, the pipe and the tabor set many pairs of heels agoing, till the walls of the old building shook with the tread of heavy feet. All this, however, implied no change for the worse in the condition of the people. They were universally in full work; they had all wherewith to fill their bellies; and if they had become somewhat careless in matters of religion and morals, who stopped to animadvert upon that? To keep the people moral was the parson's business; and if his

Sunday lectures and domiciliary visits proved inadequate to counteract the force of example among the empoyers, that was not their fault but his. Besides, nobody complained, therefore nobody was dissatisfied; and, what is more, nobody seemed to think that these halcyon days would ever have an end. But they were slightly mistaken in this, as will be seen in the next chapter.

CHAPTER II.

THE HOUSE OF MOURNING.

"Don't cry and fret so, mother," said Giles Solley, to his weeping and disconsolate parent. "To be sure, father be dead, and you be a widow, and we all be orphans like; and it's a hard thing to lose a father and a husband. But Muster Jacobson said, he thought as how my lord wouldn't turn us out of the farm if so be I was fit to carry it on; for we had held it under his honour, and his honour's forefathers, so long, that my lord couldn't but take an interest in us: and as soon as the burying is over, I'll go to Muster Sankey, the steward, and I think we will get his good word anyhow, whether we be to stay, or to quit. I am one-and-twenty next birth-day; Dick will soon be eighteen; so I am sure we are both old enough to manage the business: and little Molly is fast coming on to be of use to you; and

little Tommy can go to Dame Ansell's as usual; and so you see, after a bit, you will get up your spirits again, and we will all go on nicely, just as we used to do when father was alive."

The young man who offered this species of consolation to his mother was now the representative of a family which, during a period of more than a century and a half, had held a small farm under the noble house of Brambling. His father, who at the moment lay dead in an adjoining room, had been among the last of the smock-frock tenantry, adhering to the old practice of working his lands himself, and superintending, either in person or by his wife, the sale of the produce. Frugal, honest, and upright, he had reared his family in comfort out of the profits of a farm of forty-five acres, of which ten were now in hops; for one of the last acts of the old man's life had been to enlarge his garden, originally including six acres, to the amount just specified. It may be that old Solley's furrows exhibited a larger sprinkling of weeds among the corn than could be seen in those of his neighbour Mr. Rigden; at least, Mr. Rigden, who occupied not less than four hundred acres, said so, and gave as his reason, that it was impossible to cultivate a

small farm to any advantage. But Mr. Rigden was not more punctual at rent-day than old Solley; and old Solley's payments, though smaller in actual amount, were in full proportion to those of Mr. Rigden. Again, when Lord Brambling did by chance visit his estate at Waltham, on which, by-the-bye he had no mansion, and where he was always the guest of Mr. Sankey the steward,—though old Solley did not, like Mr. Rigden, join him in the field, nor offer him port and sherry and rich cake for luncheon, as often as he called at Crackstakes, he received, what deserves to be accounted to the full as valuable, the affections of a devoted heart; and proud was the old man of the honour conferred upon him by his landlord, if he broke a bit of bread and cheese, and drank a glass of ale under his roof. But, Lord Brambling, a disciple of the Norfolk school, was disposed to contrast the state of living at Crackstakes and at Gorse Hall, very much to the disadvantage of the former, and to express his wish that every tenant on his lands should be in a condition to give him as good a glass of wine as he could give his tenants. This was very commendable in his lordship, when regarded as an abstract proposition. It implied an earnest wish on

his part to see the tenantry flourish, and nobody could doubt, either that the wish was sincere, or that the rapid enlargement of farms on all his estates was sanctioned with a view to effect its accomplishment. Yet in Solley's particular instance, neither Lord Brambling nor his steward ever threw out a hint that old fashions were distasteful, far less insinuated that the day might come when Crackstakes would be swallowed up in the vortex of Gorse-Hall. On the contrary, the old man appeared to be a sort of pet, to whom his landlord often alluded as to a queer specimen of times gone by; and the laugh, which occasionally circulated through the neighbourhood at his expense, was always understood to take its rise from some sharp but good-natured remarks uttered at Mr. Sankey's table.

It was under these circumstances, that after a long life spent in habits of sobriety, industry, and unostentatious piety, old Solley, as everybody called him, gave up the ghost. Having married late, his wife was left a widow with four children, of whom the eldest, as I have just stated, had passed his twentieth year, while the youngest was still a mere boy. But the young people were generally understood to

have imbibed their father's correct principles; and the eldest son, in particular, was accounted a remarkably steady and hard-working lad. To be sure, they did not pretend to associate with the young farmers round them; neither did they ride such horses as could be admitted into the ranks of the yeomanry; but all men spoke well of them, and the clergyman, whose ministry they attended with praise-worthy exactness, was ready at any moment to give them a character. It was therefore regarded as a settled point in Waltham, that Giles would take his father's place, and that the Solleys would continue to make a living out of Cracksfakes, as they had done during many generations.

The old man's funeral, like the manner of his life, was plain and unostentatious. The coffin, conveyed upon a waggon as far as the churchyard gate, was there raised on the shoulders of four labourers, and was followed to the grave only by the widow and the orphans; whose tears, shed in profuse quantities, were neither forced nor feigned.

"God rest his soul," said an old thatcher, who walked up to the brink of the grave as the sexton began to shovel in the earth. "God rest his soul! He was a kind good master to

work under; and I ought to know it, for I worked for him ever since we were boys together. I wish there were more like him in the world; for I doubt no good will come of them new-fangled ways."

The thatcher's encomium was heard by few, for the mourners were already winding their sorrowful way homewards; but neither it, nor the sort-of-half-wish, half-prophecy, that accompanied it, was entirely lost even upon them.

The remainder of the day was devoted by Giles Solley, as it was natural that it should, partly to comfort his mother, whose affliction was both sincere and well-founded,—partly to devise schemes for that future, of which no man may tell the results. In the former of these attempts, it must be confessed that Giles was not very successful. Indeed it is a hard matter to find arguments so cogent as that their force shall be felt and acknowledged when the widow has returned to her home, now fourfold more desolate, seeing that the very corpse of him whom she loved has been removed from it; when her companions round the hearth are her weeping children; and the arm-chair, once peculiar to him who shall fill it no more, is standing in its accustomed place, but

standing empty. Still Giles spoke of putting our trust in Heaven; reminded his mother that there is one who is the Father of the fatherless, and the God of the widow; and asked her whether she would wish to bring back the deceased from a place of rest, whither she might be well assured that he was gone. But his mother's sole answer was, that she knew it to be wrong—she knew it to be very sinful—but she could not help it, and she hoped God would forgive her. "Oh! he was a kind husband to me," continued she, throwing herself on her son's neck, and speaking in broken sobs; "a kind, kind husband to me, and a good father to all of you; and that is the reason I am so wicked as to wish that it had pleased God to leave him here, or to take us all with him." The mother's deep emotion was of course communicated at once to her comforter; and the little group, to use the beautiful language of Scripture, "lifted up their voices and wept."

The day wore on, and the dinner-hour came, —still at Crackstakes, what it had ever been, twelve o'clock;—and the pork and greens with the apple dumplings, dressed on this occasion by the maid of all work, were eaten in silence. The meal ended, household and out-of-door

occupations put in their claims to be attended to. The widow, laying aside her best black gown, assisted for a while in washing up the dishes, till the continual cloud which gathering tears put before her eyes compelled her to cease. She then withdrew to her own chamber, and spent the remainder of the afternoon in solitude. Meanwhile Giles and his brother betook themselves to the fields. It was the season for putting in Lent corn; and the land having been prepared some time, the loss even of a few hours of favourable weather might have led to serious consequences. But the lads worked hard, as if they hoped by bodily exertion to allay the disquiet of their minds, and the men who served under them had respect to their grief, and asked no questions. A large breadth of soil was in consequence sowed ere evening set in, and both horses and men, when loosened from their toil, felt fatigued.

"I wish my father could have seen how I did my work to-day," said Dick in a subdued tone, as he and his brother walked homewards; "I am sure he wouldn't have said that I was idle now at any rate."

"No, my boy," replied Giles, putting his arm round his brother's neck; "he would

not, indeed: and how can either you or I tell that he did not see it? At all events we know, as Muster Jacobson says, that there is one eye that sees all things; and both you and I are now more bound than ever to think of this. Our poor mother will have no comfort on earth if we go wrong. Dick, you must break with Tom Overy altogether. He is not fit to be your companion; he never goes to church, and people don't speak well of him."

"I will have no friend but you, Giles," answered Dick affectionately; "no companion, no associate, but my brother; and we will work for our mother by night and by day, till we see her as cheerful as she used to be, and make her forget the loss that both she and we have suffered."

In this frame of mind the young men reached home, where they found all things arranged in the very same order that used to mark the close of each day when old Solley was alive. Their mother, likewise, had so far controlled her grief that she joined them at supper; and their conversation, though still carried on in a low tone, and interrupted from time to time by long fits of abstraction, evinced upon the whole a desire on all sides to submit their

will to that of Providence; and to look forward, not without hope, to the future. Giles again expressed his determination of waiting upon the steward on the morrow, and coming to a decision as to the continued occupation of the farm; an issue concerning which, however, none of the little party entertained any doubts: while Dick undertook to superintend the farther operations of the barley season alone, and the widow promised to be cheerful.

"And now, boys," said their mother, "who will read the chapter and pray for us, as your poor father used to do, before we went to bed?"

"I will, mother," answered Giles; "for though I cannot offer to God the same sacrifice that he offered, my own heart tells me that I mean to do what is right; and He who, out of the mouths of babes and sucklings perfecteth praise, will not shut his ear to the prayer of the desolate and afflicted."

The old Bible was accordingly handed to Giles. The maid of all work and the helper, both of whom had sat at the lower end of the table, drew in their chairs. The young man read the chapter next in succession to that at which his father had left off when strength

entirely failed him; and then, all kneeling down, the evening prayer was repeated in a clear, solemn, and distinct tone. Brief but kindly expressions of good-night followed, and the family retired to rest, if not happy, at least composed and confiding.

CHAPTER III.

A GREAT MAN'S STEWARD.

"WELL! I will go on this year," said Giles Solley to himself, as he pursued his way towards the village for the purpose of making definite arrangements with Mr. Sankey—"I will go on this year exactly as father had planned. The barley and the beans shall be put in as wished, and I will feed off the turnips with Mr. Rigden's sheep; but if it please God to spare my life another season, I will plant that bit of fallow with hops. That will give us sixteen acres; and, suppose us to grow four or five, say five bags an acre, and the price stand as it is now, at five-and-twenty pounds,—why there is a clear sixteen hundred pounds and more; from which, if I take two-thirds for rent, tithe, labour, and manure, I shall still be able to put into my pocket five hundred pounds good.

Depend upon it there is nothing like hops. I will certainly enlarge the garden next year."

Such was the current of Giles's speculations when he found himself at the steward's hall-door; from which with becoming modesty he turned away, that he might make good his entrance by the kitchen. He was soon admitted; and desiring to have a word with Mr. Sankey, the servant conducted him, after a brief delay, into the great man's parlour. A piano standing open, with music-books scattered on the chairs hard by, seemed to indicate that one of the young ladies had been recently practising; though, when Giles entered, the room was untenanted except by Mr. Sankey himself, who sat with pen and ink and a ledger before him at the table. The young man cast a hasty glance round him.

He beheld a handsome side-board decorated with two or three silver tankards, a small salver made of the same metal, two clusters of table spoons laid cross-ways one on another, and groups of wine-glasses and tumblers dividing them. Over the chimney-piece was a large mirror in a gilt frame; and round the walls, richly framed, were numerous coloured engravings, representing the "going out,"—

"the throwing off,"—"the view,"—"the death," and all the other stages of the noble pastime of fox-hunting. Intermixed with these were the representations of one or two prize-bullocks; the famous trotting horse that went at the rate of fourteen miles an hour all the way from Canterbury to London; Lord Brambling's favourite racer; a sow which farrowed sixteen pigs at a litter; the thunder-storm, from "Thomson's Seasons;" and the Marquess of Granby relieving the widow of a deceased soldier. The objects, however, which made the most lively impression on Giles's imagination were a couple of half-length portraits, one representing Mr. Sankey, which was hung over the door—the other denoting Mrs. Sankey, immediately opposite. Both of these, according to the judgment of the Walthamites, were "striking likenesses;" and each was undoubtedly worthy to be appended as a sign to the next public-house that might happen to stand in need. The effect of so much splendour (for I have said nothing of the Turkey carpet, nor of the mahogany chairs, all glittering in their circumference with bright brass nails,) considerably abashed Giles Solley, who stood accordingly confused enough, just inside the

threshold, holding his hat in his left hand, while with his right he smoothed down the hair upon his brow.

"Well, Giles," said the steward, without deigning to bid the young man sit, "I was just thinking of sending for you. The death of your father must be a great loss to you all, and no man will lament it more than my lord. He was a mighty favourite with my lord, as you know. And what do you mean to do, Giles? where do you mean to fix your mother? Not that there is any immediate hurry about that, for my lord is very kind, and you will of course remain where you are till after Michaelmas. But it may not be amiss if you consider what is best to be done afterwards; and I am sure I shall be very happy, out of respect to your father's memory, to grant you all the assistance in my power."

"I thank your honour very much," replied Giles, "and I never doubted my lord's goodwill to a family that has been under him so long as we have; and therefore I came this evening to say that, with my lord's leave and your honour's, I will go on just as father did before me, so that there won't be any occasion to look for a home for mother, because she will

live with me at Crackstakes, and look after things as usual."

"Humph!" answered the steward, "that is very good as far as you are concerned; it shows a right feeling for your mother, and does you great credit; though, Giles, what will Mary Tapsal say to it? I don't think the old and the young would agree very well together, for they say it never answers to keep two clucking hens in the same nest."

"Oh! as to that, you know," replied Giles, smiling, "Mary and I haven't been published yet, and we can wait a while, if we ever be published at all. My first duty is to see that mother is made comfortable, and Mary is too good a girl not to like me the better for attending to that."

"Very true, Giles," said the steward, in a tone somewhat more serious; "but I am afraid there are other objections to the arrangement. I doubt whether you have experience or capital enough to carry on farming business as my lord wishes it to be conducted. You are but a boy, tall and stout as you are. I think it would be best for you to wait a few years before you think of setting up for yourself."

"Lord love your honour!" was Giles's re-

ply: "I have had the chief management of the concern these two year; for father's health has long been breaking, and he trusted me with everything. To be sure, there arn't much capital among us; but we are not worse off than we were when father was alive; and you know yourself, Mr. Sankey, that we bean't extravagant in our habits."

"Yes, Giles, all that is very just. But, you see, times are changed. My lord does not like these small holdings. He says, what is true, that where there is not a great outlay upon land, there can never be a great return; and that the farmer ought to keep pace with other classes in society. As long as your father lived, he would not, on any account, interfere with the old man's fancies; but now he does not wish to let Crackstakes any longer by itself. He is desirous of adding something to it, so that the concern may better repay the labour and the capital that are expended on it."

"My lord is very good," replied Giles, looking up with a sort of half hopeful, half doubting expression; "and I take it very kind of him to trouble himself about our success. But I should like to take a day or two to consider whether we could venture to hire another farm.

Father used to say that these new-fangled ways would lead to no good in the long-run; and that we should live to see, though he might not, all these gentlemen farmers break up and go to pieces. But father *had* fancies, I allow, and mayhap this was one of them. Still I should like to consult mother about it."

"Ay, but Giles, even if your mother agreed, there are other difficulties to be overcome. You know that it is a very different thing to enter upon a farm of five hundred acres, and a farm of fifty acres. There are horses, waggons, thrashing-machines, all sorts of implements to purchase, besides the stock already on the land. All that requires capital, and you have just admitted that there is not much of that at your command."

"Five hundred acres!" exclaimed Giles, with a stare of astonishment; I should never think of taking charge of five-hundred acres. Fifty-five or sixty, just to bring Crackstakes up to a hundred, we might manage; and I dare say Mr. Rigden wouldn't object to part with so much. But five hundred is quite beyond our mark. I am very much obliged to my lord for the offer, but I would rather continue as I am."

"Perhaps so, Giles," answered the steward; "but you see my lord won't have it so. And therefore, if you can't undertake an additional holding of four hundred and fifty acres, why then I suspect it must end in your giving up what you have. My lord will, in that case, add Crackstakes to Gorse Hall."

"Your honour can't mean that," replied Giles, in a tone of mixed alarm and incredulity. "My lord would never think of turning us out of a farm that we have held for so many generations, as long as we are able and willing to pay the rent that he chooses to put upon it."

"Indeed, Giles, but I do mean, if not that, at all events something very like it. The fact of the matter is this: these small farms won't do. They don't put those that hold them in a better situation than the labourer; on the contrary, I am inclined to think that their situation is much worse; and it is quite certain that they neither produce so much, nor can be managed with the same nicety, as the large farms. In short, the system is a bad one. Look at the expense of keeping up a house, a barn, a stable, and all the other appendages to a farm, for every forty or fifty acres of land. And then, look at the class of persons that in-

habit these farms. What the landlords want now is an intelligent and enlightened tenantry: and everybody knows that you cannot render the tenantry intelligent and enlightened, unless you encourage them to acquire habits altogether different from those of the old-fashioned smock-frocks. So I suppose, Giles, we must end where we began,—by your thinking what is to be done for your mother and family after Michaelmas."

"Done!" replied Giles, while his lip quivered and his cheek flushed. "What can be done! If my lord turn us out of Crackstakes, without our committing any fault to deserve it, mother may be carried away, but go she will not. She will lie down and die, and then we shall know what to do with her."

"Pooh, pooh! my good fellow," answered the steward, "all that is very fine talking; but people don't die for trifles, you may depend upon it. For what will your situation be worse when you do quit Crackstakes? You know that I have seen you at all hours. Your fare is not better than that of the hedger and ditcher; your dress is precisely the same with the labouring classes; you all work harder than the people whom you hire to help you; and you

have not half the number of holidays that they have. I really thought, Giles, you had been a lad of sense; but if you hold such language as this, I shall begin to fancy that I was mistaken."

"Whatever I may be," replied Giles, bitterly, "at least your honour knows that I am come of an honest stock. Have we ever been behind with our rent? and have we not always paid as much and as regularly, in proportion, as Mr. Rigden, or any other of the gentlemen farmers?"

"I cannot deny that you have, Giles."

"And if my lord gets his rent, and we pay our way and do justice to his land, what matters it how we live, provided we be content with our living?"

"But, Giles, don't you see that everywhere else small farms are extinguished; and you wouldn't have my lord keep a class of tenants about him such as no other landlord will tolerate."

"It is not every landlord, Mr. Sankey, that can point to a tenant's house, and say—'that was occupied by the family which holds it still, before the lands came into the possession of my

forefathers, and they have always behaved to me and my ancestors like honest men.'"

"Nay, young man, if that is the turn you are going to take, you must allow me to remind you, that though your family may have made a living under Lord Brambling for four or five generations, that circumstance gives them no claim to the property of the land which they have so long occupied. I suppose you will admit that my lord has a right to do what he likes with his own?"

"I don't deny it, sir," said Giles, the tears now gathering fast into his eyes, and an excess of agitation choking his utterance; "and if he do send us adrift, my worst wish towards him is, that he may never find cause to repent it. Have we ever wronged him in any thing?"

"I don't exactly know what you mean by wronging my lord; you have certainly paid your rent, and maintained a good character, which will not fail to be of use to you wherever you go; but you must see what others see with half an eye, that the lands of Crackstakes are not cultivated in the same style with the lands of Gorse Hall, nor of course the most made of them."

"I deny that altogether," replied Giles warmly; "I know that Mr. Rigden has often said as much; and I now see what was his object. He wanted to get our bit of land into his own occupation, and he seems likely enough to succeed. But let him remember what Nathan said about the rich man who took his poor neighbour's single ewe lamb, lest he be not, one day or another, treated as David threatened to treat the oppressor."

"Look you, young man," replied the steward, in his turn waxing warm; "I take it you didn't come here to preach, or give me any of your impertinence; but to ascertain how my lord intended to deal with one of his farms which is now vacant. And I will cut the matter short by telling you, that you shall not have it. If you had played your cards well, I might have been a friend to you. As it is, I have nothing further to say than that you quit at Michaelmas, and that you may make any arrangements for the future that you please, for I wash my hands of you."

"And is this all?" demanded Giles.

"This is certainly all," was the reply; while Mr. Sankey rose, and extending his hand to the bell, rang it. "Show Mr. Solley out," said

he to the servant-girl as she entered. But Giles seemed rooted to the spot, while a thousand varied passions were working in his breast. At last he spoke.

"I did not expect this, Mr. Sankey; I did not expect this from you. I thought that we were sure of your good word, anyhow. But I find that father knew you better than I did, or mother either; and that there was too much reason for what he said, that both you and Mr. Rigden were snakes in the grass. You a friend! No, sir, you never were, and you never could be, a friend to anybody but yourself. But no matter: the world is wide, and there is no want of employment; and we can't starve, let come what may. And, mayhap, my lord will yet live to acknowledge that he did not act a wise or a generous part when he dismissed a family that would have laid down their lives to serve him, in order to oblige such a one as Mr. Rigden. But it 's no use standing here."

As he said this, Giles turned on his heel and walked away, in a very different frame of mind from that which attended him in his progress from Crackstakes to the village.

CHAPTER IV.

LETTER-WRITING.

At the door of their own house Giles was met by his mother, whose countenance, though deeply overshadowed with melancholy, implied that a sense of what was due both to her family and to herself was beginning to work out its accustomed beneficial effects. A faint smile curled her mouth, and there was an expression of something like impatience in her eyes, as she good-humouredly challenged her son for having delayed so long on his mission; but when he passed her without speaking, and threw himself doggedly into his father's chair, the heart of the widow sank within her, and she could with difficulty suppress her tears.

"What is the matter, Giles?" said she. "What has happened since you went out in the morning?"

"Oh, nothing, mother; nothing at all!" re-

plied Giles; "nothing more, at least, than we might have expected. Mr. Sankey and my lord are tired of seeing the Solleys so long in the occupation of Crackstakes; that is all, and they mean to have a change. We are to quit at Michaelmas, and to find a home for ourselves wherever we can."

"Oh, no, no!" cried his mother: "surely you are trifling with me, Giles. And I am in no fit state to be played upon, God knows! That is quite impossible. My lord would never part with the oldest tenants that he has, and send the widow and orphans of one whom he used to treat so kindly adrift into the world."

"Ah! but he can, and he will though," answered Giles, sternly. "What cares my lord about such folks as we? It seems we have not capital enough to satisfy Mr. Sankey, and our occupation is too small to satisfy my lord; and because we can't afford to vie with Mr. Rigden, we must get out of his way, and leave Crackstakes to be joined on to the lands of Gorse Hall You may depend upon it, mother, that I speak the truth when I tell you that we must make up our minds to go at Michaelmas."

"And where are we to go, Giles?" exclaimed his mother, dropping into a chair beside him,

and burying her face in her apron. "Where are we to find a living if this be taken away from us? It was not for nothing that I said all hope was buried in your father's grave. Oh! my dear, dear husband, I would to God that I were laid beside you!"

"Nay, nay, mother," said Giles, restored to comparative calmness by the contemplation of his mother's grief, "it is no use taking on at this rate. What must be, must; and if we cannot bear up against the storm, we must bend to it. But we shan't be put off by a notice from the steward only: we have been long enough on the land to justify the liberty, and I will apply to my lord himself. Who knows but he may have compassion on us after all? and in spite of Mr. Sankey, you may yet go on to old age in the house where your children were born."

"God bless you, my boy!" replied the widow, drying her tears. "You shall do as you say, and I am sure my lord will not deny the petition of the father's son. But how will you get at my lord? You cannot go to London to seek him, and you have not been used to write to such as he."

'I will manage that somehow," answered

Giles. "There is Dick's friend, Tom Overy. I don't like him much, certainly; but he can write well, and as I want no more of him than to put down what I shall dictate, I don't see how either he can do us any harm, or we have any reason to distrust him."

"I would not trust that young man in anything," answered his mother. "Your father was a good judge of character, and he always said, that if Tom Overy had a soul at all, it was the soul of Judas Iscariot. Rather ask Mr. Rigden himself to write for us: he may be a little high or so, but we have no right to suppose that he is our enemy."

"No, no, mother, that won't do at all. But leave the matter to me: my lord shall be written to, that is quite fixed; and whether it be in Mr. Rigden's hand or Tom Overy's, the letter will tell its own tale. In the mean while I must go and look after the bean season."

Giles departed as he spoke, to pursue his labours in the field, which he did moody, silent, and thoughtful, while his mother resumed her domestic occupations; the hopes which she ventured to encourage of success in her son's endeavour maintaining a fierce, but,

on the whole, an unequal combat with her apprehensions of failure.

When the hour of striking work came, Giles and his brother returned home as usual together, without, however, Giles having communicated to Dick anything that had occurred. He knew that his brother, though warm-hearted, was giddy and volatile; and it had been agreed between his mother and himself that, for the present at least, no mention should be made of what had taken place at Mr. Sankey's. Little conversation therefore passed between them, and even at supper Giles was unusually reserved. Of course the curiosity of the younger brother was roused, and he questioned Giles as to the cause of his silence; but he received no satisfactory answer. On the contrary, Giles rose as soon as the meal was ended, took his hat, and moved towards the door.

"Why, brother, what is the matter?" again demanded Dick. "There must be something wrong that takes you out of a night; and it is not fair to keep the secret from me, who keep no secrets from you?"

"Your brother has some business to manage for me in the street," said their mother. "It

is of no great consequence, but it must be done to-night."

"And may not I go with him?" asked Dick, rising.

"No, my boy, not now," replied Giles. "Stay and make ready the remainder of the seed against to-morrow morning. I will soon be back again, and then we shall read a chapter."

Dick affected to be, if he was not, satisfied, and began to sift the bag of seed-beans with great assiduity as soon as the speaker had closed the outer door behind him.

The distance between Crackstakes and Waltham was barely a quarter of a mile, so Giles Solley soon traversed it. It was the beginning of March; and though the church clock had struck no more than the first quarter past seven, night was as thoroughly closed in as if it had been three hours later. Labour having universally ceased, there was that sort of stir in the street, which, under similar circumstances, may be found in almost every English village. Men were passing to and fro, or stopping to converse in groups. Women were going to the shop, or returning home with their little purchases. Children were

shouting, clamouring, and chasing one another. From the bakers' and the grocers' windows light was streaming; and the public-houses sent forth each its noise of revelry and singing. Giles, though he scarcely expected to find Tom Overy at his lodgings, proceeded thither in quest of him; but being told that he had not shown himself there since he went abroad in the morning, he turned his steps in an opposite direction. He stopped at the door of the Black Dog; received an answer in the affirmative as to Tom's presence there; made some excuse for not passing to the tap-room, and requested that Tom might be called out. He came,—apparently in his usual state, that is to say, not drunk, though somewhat elevated with liquor; and finding who it was that desired to converse with him, burst into a shout of astonishment.

"What, Giles! Giles Solley! art going to turn good fellow at last? Well, I thought it would be so after all. Now the old man is out of the way, we shall have both one and t'other among us. Come in, man; come in and have a drop. I will stand treat to-night, anyhow, were it only for the pleasure of seeing thee like other folk."

"Stop a bit, Tom," replied Giles; "I don't mean to go in. I never meant it, otherwise I should have done so at first. What I want is, that thou would do me a friendly act elsewhere; and though thou beest one of the wildest, Tom, I give thee credit for no bad heart at bottom. Wilt thou stand my friend for once in a way?"

"To be sure I will," replied Overy; "but how? what am I to do for thee?"

"To write a letter to my lord, such as may hinder Muster Sankey from sending us adrift out of Crackstakes, and breaking poor mother's heart."

"You don't mean that the scoundrel has any intention of that sort?"

"Yes, but I do, though; and what is more, unless we get the start of him, I am doubtful that he will succeed. Can't you go home with me now, and write what I dictate?"

Overy seemed to reflect for a moment, while his eye averted itself from that of his companion, and a slight flush passed over his cheek; but he answered almost immediately by declaring that it was impossible for him to quit his friends at that precise moment. "Neither will it be convenient to manage the affair sooner

than to-morrow afternoon; but if you will be at my lodgings exactly at six, I will have pens and paper ready, and we will draw up such a letter as will set you all square with my lord." Giles could not of course press the point, though he experienced more of disappointment at the delay than his more sober judgment could account for. So, after promising to be punctual, he shook hands with his new associate, and returned to his impatient mother.

The remainder of that evening was spent at Crackstakes according to the custom which old Solley had established; and the sleep of its humble inmates, if not free from uneasy dreams, was, upon the whole, refreshing. With the morrow, however, came a necessity for exertion, which is always the parent of tranquillity; and Giles and Dick were hard at work as soon as there was light. Neither did there occur any incident of which it is necessary to take notice, till about three hours after noon, when Giles, who was assisting to dig the hop-garden where it bordered upon a bridle-path, observed two horsemen, whom he at once recognised as Mr. Rigden and Mr. Sankey the steward, riding slowly together, as it seemed, from Gorse Hall to Waltham.

It is not always easy to account for feelings, either of repugnance or its opposite, and on the present occasion Giles knew no reason why he ought to shun either the notice or the conversation of his neighbours; but he instinctively drew back as the gentlemen approached, till he had placed a stack of hop-poles between him and the road. Giles was no eavesdropper; indeed he would have removed farther out of ear-shot had he not been aware that it would have been impossible to do so without subjecting himself to observation. He therefore stood still; and the following broken sentences, apparently the continuation of a dialogue which had been for some time carried on, slightly, and only slightly, attracted his attention:—

"You could not do better," observed Mr. Rigden; "the impertinent puppy deserves to suffer for his assurance; and there is nothing like catching such in his own snare. But may you trust the other?"

"Why not? What object had he in coming to me at all, except to earn a shilling or two? *I* know him to be rogue enough to sell his own soul, far less his friend's character, for half-a-crown; and *he* knows that he will get nothing out of me unless he earns it."

"Well, but are you to see it after it is written?"

"No, I suppose not; but that don't signify. Besides, I have taken care to——"

Here the distance to which the speaker had advanced beyond the spot where Giles stood caused the remainder of the sentence to be lost; and Giles, having waited till a turn in the road concealed both him and his companion, resumed his labour without wasting a thought on what had been uttered in his hearing.

Giles not only did not repeat what he had overheard when he returned home, but had by that time totally forgotten that anything of the kind had occurred. His whole attention was indeed given up to the composition of the letter, on which he could not but believe all the prospects of his family would depend. Two extremes must, he conceived, be avoided. It would not answer his purpose to bring charges against a man in whom his landlord reposed confidence; while to beg abjectly for that to which he fancied that he had a sort of moral right, would go sorely against the grain. "I may tell him," said he to himself, "that on all his lands there is not a family that would

go farther to serve him than we; I may put him in mind that we have never been behind with our rent; that not one of our name has ever brought discredit on the place; that though we may be poor, we are honest; and that my poor father, if he could look from his grave, would break his heart to see us anywhere except in Crackstakes. And then as to Muster Sankey, I may surely say, that it is very hard that we, who have been under his lordship so many years, should be ordered out by one who came into his service only yesterday. Yes, yes, I am sure that I may go so far. But I needn't say what I think, that it is all made up between them; and that it is not for nothing that Mr. Rigden is to be put in possession of our few acres. That would only make my lord angry, and I don't want anything but justice at his hands. Ay, we will manage it so; and unless my lord be very different from what he seemed to be when he used to visit us two years ago, I think that we shall get justice after all."

So saying, Giles hastily washed his face and hands, slipped on a clean gaberdine over his soiled under-garments, and with an anxious but not a distrusting heart, set out for Tom Overy's lodgings. He found Tom ready to receive him,

with a sheet of gilt-edged paper, a pen, and a little ink in a broken wine-glass; and the two sitting down to the table together, the work of composition began. I need not add, that it was carried forward with so much deliberation and care, that a full hour elapsed ere it came to the affixing of the signature. But completed it was at last, much to the satisfaction of both parties; and Giles had tucked up his sleeve to sign, when Tom, who either did not observe or affected not to observe the movement, anticipated him. The words "Giles Solley" were thus appended in the same hand which gave its character to the epistle; and Giles was with little difficulty convinced that it ought to be so. "And now for sealing it," said Tom; "just go to that cupboard and fetch a paper of wafers that you will see on the upper shelf." Giles did so, and beheld to his astonishment when he returned, that the very address on the back of the letter was completed.

"Why, Tom," said he, "thou can write fast enough when thou likes. It has taken thee less time to write this long direction than it did to date the letter, or write, 'Please your lordship.'"

"To be sure it has," replied Tom, "and for

an excellent reason: one doesn't begin a letter without thinking a long while what is to follow; but when it comes to the direction, all that, you know, is plain sailing, and it is easy to write when one don't think."

"Well, well," answered Giles, with a laugh, "your reason may be a very good one, though I fancy all the thinking was mine; thou had only to write down as I spoke. But mayhap it is easier to write on the outside of a sheet of paper than on the inside."

Tom replied only with a laugh. The wafer was duly wetted and stuck between the folds. It was then carefully dried at the fire to prevent the slightest risk of opening at the post-office; and the friends setting out together dropped it into the slit in Mrs. Newsman's window. There they parted; for Tom, as usual, betook himself to the Black Dog, while Giles returned home to eat his supper, to read his Bible, to say his prayers, and to go to rest.

CHAPTER V.

LOVE IN A VILLAGE.

Allusion was made in a previous chapter to one Mary Tapsal, towards whom Mr. Sankey jocularly accused Giles Solley of harbouring something like an attachment. It will be remembered, also, that Giles rather evaded than denied the charge; and it has probably been conjectured, from that circumstance, that the charge was not wholly groundless. Nor would he who arrived at that judgment fall into any serious error, provided he took care to keep in mind what are the habits of young men and young women of Giles's rank in life under similar circumstances. To keep company with one another is a phrase which every lad and lass in the county of Kent perfectly understands. It scarcely implies that there is any positive love between the parties; it does not include any matrimonial engagement; and it never,

unless they be quite wanting in principle and prudence, signifies criminality. For years young people may keep company by walking on a Sunday evening after church; by seeming to relish each other's society whenever accident or design shall bring them elsewhere together; yet they may never marry after all; for, as I have just said, it does not follow because they keep company that a young man and young woman are attached. It is rather a sort of attempt on the one side or the other, or both, to ascertain how far they are likely to become attached to one another.

Such was supposed to be the state of things between Giles Solley and Mary Tapsal, the latter being the pretty daughter of a pig-merchant in Waltham; and now, and for a year previously, a nurse-maid in the curate's family. The world, however, (for there is a world at Waltham as well as at Westminster,) said that whatever warmth of feeling might exist was entirely on Giles's side; and that Mary, vain of her good looks, cared very little for his society, except so far as it flattered her love of admiration. But Giles entertained on that head opinions of his own; he fancied that he possessed great influence over Mary, and he had his rea-

sons for supposing so. When he first formed her acquaintance, she was in the habit of walking a good deal with Tom Overy, the same gay, larking, frolicksome, dissipated youth who had recently acted as Giles's amanuensis. She had danced with him at more than one ball; she evidently preferred his impudent, and therefore brilliant conversation, to that of the villagers in general; and he was several times known to have absented himself from his club at the Black Dog, in order to spend the evening with her. From the day, however, that Giles ventured to warn her against one whose gallantries were as notorious as his mien and form were said to be attractive, she gradually withdrew from his acquaintance, till latterly she saw no more of him—at least, so Giles was assured,—than she did of any other person whom she might chance to meet in passing to and fro about the parish. Now, as Tom was a tailor by trade, and worked at the public board, to which for four days out of the six he was pretty constant, their converse could hardly be of a nature calculated very deeply to interest either party, seeing that it seldom went beyond an exchange of sentences at the open window. As Mary

tripped by with her infant charge in her arms, she would, indeed, stop just to exchange salutations with him; but nobody could object to that: indeed it would have been positively uncivil to refuse to an old friend such proofs that he was not utterly forgotten.

Fathers and mothers, it is alleged, are seldom apt to approve of the choice which their children make in early life of persons with whom to keep company. Old Solley, to be sure, being otherwise employed, took little notice of Giles's flirtations; indeed, he reposed in his son such unbounded confidence that, to use his favourite expression, "he would trust the boy anywhere, and never fear that he would disgrace himself." It was not so with Giles's mother. She had repeatedly expressed her disapprobation of the acquaintance. She spoke of Mary as a weak, idle, dressy, and heartless girl, and more than once took Giles seriously to task for having anything to say to her. But Giles received the lectures when they came with so much good-humour, never seeking to vindicate Mary's prudence, or to justify his own fancy, that his mother seemed at last to acquiesce in the sentiment with which he invariably closed the discussion, "Don't you fret yourself about

Mary Tapsal, mother. I am a great deal too young to marry, even if I could keep a wife; and you may depend upon it that I will never take one till I can keep her. In the mean while, all that I do is keep company with her, and you know there is no harm in that."

Since his father's death, and, indeed, during the last stage of the old man's illness, Giles had been too much occupied with other matters to think much of Mary. Now that the painful excitement was in some degree worn off, his thoughts began to revert into their accustomed channel. He longed to see and to converse with her, more especially as there was a vague curiosity about him to observe how he would be received now that he was become in some sort the head of a family. It is very true, that of marriage, at least of immediate marriage, Giles would have scouted the idea: he knew that he had a great duty to perform; and no consideration of self could have induced him for a moment to neglect his mother and her young family. But there is a strange disposition inherent in men of all ranks to make themselves, under almost any circumstances, agreeable to the other sex; and a willingness to seek for proof that, had not some insuperable

obstacle stood in the way, they might have made themselves more than agreeable. Perhaps, it was this motive, or some other akin to it, that drove Giles on; for on the second evening after his letter to Lord Brambling had been despatched, he quitted the hop-garden a little earlier than was his wont; and having brushed himself up, as he termed it, by putting on a clean white smock-frock, he set out for the vicarage.

If the truth must be spoken, Giles had at former seasons been wont, especially on a Saturday night, to act as he proposed to do on the present occasion; that is to say, he made his way quietly into the churchyard, which was separated from the vicarage garden only by a low wall, and held across the fence half-an-hour's chat with Mary. Nothing had ever passed during these conferences that might not have been spoken before the whole parish; yet the interviews were to Giles very sweet, either because that which we snatch by stealth acquires an artificial value from the notion that it is stolen, or because a maiden's voice, even when she says but little, sounds peculiarly musical in the silence of starlight. Pleasant, therefore, were Giles's anticipations as he pursued his

accustomed route, so as to leave the village considerably to the left, or, as a military man would express himself, to turn it; and light was the bound which carried him over the churchyard wall, at a point where the shadow of a solid buttress skreened him. There was no moon, but the sky was bright and cloudless, and the air so still that not a leafless bough waved; indeed, the only sound discernible was the hum of voices from the street, subdued by distance into notes that were not unmusical. All this was in his favour, for he had given Mary no warning, and he did therefore experience some misgivings lest his signal might not be answered; but he resolved at all events, having gone thus far, to see the adventure out, or at least to make a trial whether her sense of hearing was as acute as her glance was penetrating.

Walking very cautiously under the shadow of the old church, Giles had gained the western extremity of the tower, and was just about to emerge into the open space that lay between him and the vicarage garden, when the whispering of two persons fell upon his ear. He stopped short, and squeezing into the very angle between the building itself and its project-

ing buttresses, endeavoured to conceal himself. This he did more for Mary's sake than his own; for he knew that people would guess the truth were they to surprise him at such an hour in her vicinity; and not for all that he was worth would he subject her good name to be lightly spoken of, no matter how unjustly. It seemed, however, that his utmost caution would not avail, for the voices drew every moment nearer; and at last, two persons, a man and a woman, stood within arm's length of him. Giles looked at them, rubbed his eyes, held his breath, and looked again. The arm of the man was round the woman's waist; and she, leaning her head on his shoulder, seemed to be weeping.

"And can you, Tom, give me this advice?" said a voice which, even when it whispered, caused the blood to curdle in Giles's veins. "Am I not willing rather to bear everything with you,—poverty, the anger of my parents, shame itself!"

"I can't help myself, Mary, indeed I can't," was the answer. "What is done is not to be undone. But as to marrying, you know that I have not the means of maintaining a wife; and if I had, you would not be happy.

But he is now a gentleman. The old man is out of the way; he inherits every thing; and the sooner you make up the match with him, the better it will be for your own sake. Besides, can I not see you when you are Mrs. Solley just as often as I did when you were Mary Tapsal?"

Giles felt his brain whirl round when these words were spoken. If any doubt had hitherto rested on his mind, it was now dispelled; and he became assured that there stood before him a scoundrel as black, and a girl as thoroughly corrupted, as the whole county of Kent could produce. He suppressed his feelings, however, to a degree which afterwards astonished himself, and listened while the conversation proceeded.

"Oh, no, no!" replied the girl, labouring, as it seemed, under great emotion; "I am not yet so lost as that comes to. I could not bring disgrace into poor Giles's family; and if I once spoke the word at the altar, no man, not even you, Tom, fatal as to me your tongue has been, would tempt me to forget my vow."

"My dear Mary," rejoined the other, "has all my instruction ended in this? What is it that I have been telling you ever since our

acquaintance began, but that both you and I have only one thing to do in life, which is, to make all other considerations bend to our own convenience. What nonsense is this that you talk? Won't it be better that you carry disgrace into poor Giles's family than that you be yourself brought before the justice to swear to the father of your child? And won't Giles be very much obliged to you, if you make his fire-side merry at the end of six, instead of twelve months? As to what will follow after the word is spoken, never mind that for the present. There is enough on our hands without looking forward so far."

"I can't do it, Tom; and won't do it. But here on my knees I pray to you to shield me from shame. You know that to you I owe my fall. Oh! if there be a spark of pity in you, save me from what is worse than death! I will work for you by day and by night. I will be no restraint upon your humours. Your friends shall be my friends, your companions my companions. Never from me shall you hear a word of reproach, even when you most neglect me; and if in your anger you beat me, I will bear it without complaining. Oh! Tom, if you be a man, make me your wife!"

The unfortunate girl had suited the action to the word, and was kneeling before her seducer, of the workings of whose countenance there was not light enough to permit Giles to judge, but whose voice when he spoke was clear, calm, cold, almost exulting.

"Now, Mary, don't give us any more heroics, for God's sake! we had enough of that two nights ago, and you know that I told you then how completely my mind was made up, and that if you did not do as I recommended, I would certainly go for a soldier; for whether the brat be mine or not——"

"Can you, dare you, breathe a doubt of that?" exclaimed the girl, speaking aloud, and springing to her feet — "Am I then suspected by you? What business have I to live? What is there that I should live for?"

She burst from him as she said this, and made a spring towards the garden wall; but Overy soon overtook her, and leading her back to the spot where they had first stood, made her sit down on a flat tombstone, and placed himself beside her. Their backs were now to Giles; but as they had gradually elevated their voices while the conversation deepened in its interest, he still overheard distinctly every

syllable that was uttered. I will not pollute these pages by transcribing some of the horrid hints which the miscreant threw out. Enough is done when I state, that he seemed to possess an enchanter's power over his victim; that in her wildest paroxysms he soothed her, without ever throwing into his manner the leering of affection; and that he led her on to discuss topics, from the bare images of which, had they risen into her mind when alone, she would have turned away with affright. Among these one implied that she should actually become the degraded thing, the horror of being mistaken for which had wellnigh deprived her of reason; and Giles Solley was again the individual proposed on whom to inflict the injury; and finding that from this she turned away, it was calmly and deliberately suggested, that an oath could at any rate be taken with ease. Still she resisted; upon which Overy rising, spoke with a sternness which made the degraded creature tremble.

"I see how it is; you are determined to saddle me with an expense which I can't afford, and I am equally determined that if you do, you shall never see me more. To be sure, that may be no great cause of grief to you:

another his senses were suddenly restored, and he made use of them to flee from the spot where he had seen such sights, and listened to such sounds. Heedless, moreover, of everything except an immediate escape from the churchyard, he took no pains to avoid observation in his retreat, as he had done during his advance. He made at once for a gate that opened into the village, and, dashing through, ran with frantic step towards Crackstakes.

"Holloa, Giles!" exclaimed a voice, which, had he kept his senses about him, he would have recognised as that of the steward. "Pretty doings for so quiet a young man,—a nice place the churchyard for a walk by starlight!"

Still Giles ran on, till, suddenly turning a corner, the strong light from a forge fell on him, and as bad luck would have it, there stood Mr. Rigden.

"Why, Giles," cried he, "hast been fighting? Thou art all over blood, man!"

Not a word was uttered by Giles in reply. He ran home, passed through the hall without speaking, took no heed of his mother, or the supper-table spread, or the Bible laid upon

it; but, hastening to his room, shut the door with a bang, and locked it on the inside. There was no family worship that night at Crackstakes, nor any friendly converse among its inmates; but all, after repeated efforts to draw Giles from his seclusion, slunk off to their respective chambers.

CHAPTER VI.

A SEARCH.

Long before noon on the following day there was indescribable excitement and alarm both at Crackstakes, and throughout the parish of Waltham and the surrounding neighbourhood. At Crackstakes, Giles was nowhere to be found. When the family again rose the hall door was found unfastened. That of his bedroom stood open—but he was not within; while in the middle of the floor lay the smock-frock which he had worn the previous evening saturated with blood. Meanwhile an event neither less looked for, nor less appalling, had occurred elsewhere. Mary Tapsal was missing. Far and near they sought her, but they sought to no purpose. The curate's wife, with whom she lived, could only state that when the bell rang for Mary about ten o'clock she was absent, and that the answer was that she had stepped over to her father's

half an hour ago, and was not yet returned; but taking it for granted that something had detained her, the family concluded their devotions and went to bed. The night accordingly passed without the slightest uneasiness having been experienced; but the children beginning to cry at an unusually early hour, Mrs. Jacobson became alarmed, and, passing into the nursery, discovered, not only that Mary was not there, but that her bed had never been occupied.

The first and most natural conviction created was, that Mary had grossly deceived her; that she was an immoral and loose girl, and ought never to be admitted again within the doors. No farther notice was therefore taken of her absence than that the mother lay down beside the infants, and in due time dressed and washed them with her own hands. This done, all things resumed their accustomed routine till about noon, when Mr. Jacobson suggested that it would be no more than just to ascertain from old Tapsal whether his daughter had slept during the night at his house; and, at all events, to desire that her boxes might be sent for, as she could no longer be permitted to live at the vicarage.

The boy who carried this message soon returned with an announcement that Mary had not crossed her father's threshold since the preceding Wednesday, and that if she was not in her master's house her father could not tell where she was. Upon this the housemaid was summoned. At first she repeated the same story which she had told over-night; but, being sharply questioned, she soon began to equivocate.

"Indeed, she knew nothing about it. All that she did know was what Mary told her; and she had positively stated that she was going to see her father."

"At what hour did she go out?"

The girl could not exactly tell. It might be nine, or it might be earlier.

"And can you pretend to say, that having gone out at nine, or a little earlier, and being still absent at ten, you either believed at the time, or believe now, that she was gone to her father's?"

"Well, then, if mistress would only forgive her this time, she would confess that Mary sometimes went out to converse with a young man, and that she did go on the previous night for that purpose." But who the young

man was, the girl either did not know, or she persisted in asserting that she was entirely ignorant. Enough, however, was ascertained to excite new suspicions and to give birth to new fears; and it was more than ever judged necessary to take old Tapsal into the conclave, and to consider with him what steps ought to be taken for the purpose of discovering the absentee.

There was no occasion to send a formal summons for Tapsal. Dissolute as are the usual habits of the kind of traders called pig-jobbers, even they have some touch of nature about them; and apprehensions for the safety of his child had already brought the father to a place where, if anywhere, tidings were likely to be obtained of her. He was ushered into the curate's parlour, kindly desired to sit down; a glass of wine was poured out for him, which he drank, and then the discussion began.

"He really did not know that Mary kept company with any one, unless it might be with Giles Solley; but even that he knew only by report, for he did not think he had ever seen them together."

"And if you had," observed Mr. Jacobson, "I am quite ready to become bail for Giles.

She will never come to harm if she keep company only with him, or some other of his kind."

"The lad is well enough, sir," replied Tapsal; "but I wish that he, or whoever else it may be, that has spirited her away in this manner, would bring her back again, or let us know where he has hidden her."

"I do think," said Mr. Jacobson, speaking in a great measure to himself, "that Giles ought to be here. I remember now, that I have met them frequently together after the evening's service on the summer Sundays; and though I acquit him of all wicked designs, still, as he has been in the habit of walking with her openly, it is not beyond the range of possibility that he may have sometimes met her by stealth. Run to Crackstakes, Will, and beg Mr. Giles Solley to come down and speak to me as soon as possible."

The boy ran as he was desired, and being, as all youths similarly circumstanced, are apt to be, eager to circulate intelligence which had excited astonishment in himself, he took care, while passing through the village, to detail to more than one person considerably more than he knew for fact. Among others he met Mr. Son-

key, to whom, after touching his hat, he proceeded to communicate the news.

"And where are you now going, my man?" was the steward's question.

"To Cracketakes, sir," replied the boy; "master thinks that Mr. Giles Solley may know something about her, and I am going to fetch him."

"Giles Solley!" exclaimed Mr. Sankey with a start. "Good God, can it be possible! Look ye, young man, come back with me. I will be answerable for your disobedience of orders. Come back with me. I must have a word with your master in private before we send for Giles Solley. Good God! who would have thought it?"

The steward and the servant hurried back to the vicarage. Old Tapsal, Mrs. Jacobson, and others, whom curiosity had drawn together, were requested to withdraw; and Mr. Sankey described, not without much unaffected horror, the circumstances under which he had met Giles Solley on the preceding night.

"Nor is that all," continued he; "my friend, Mr. Rigden, saw him too, and told me, not an hour ago, that his clothes were, for all the world, as if he had been slaughtering a pig."

"What!" cried Mr. Jacobson, in a shrill tone; "covered with blood!"

"Ay, covered with blood, sir!"

"Good heavens!" exclaimed the curate; "good heavens! But that is quite out of the question! Pooh! pooh! I would as soon believe that I myself had done a thing of the sort, as that Giles Solley did it."

"That may be, sir," answered the steward; "but the circumstance must be inquired into at all events. I think we had best send for Mr. Rigden,—I left him scarce a quarter of an hour ago at the saddler's,—and if his tale corroborate mine, I am sure that you will agree with me in thinking that at least appearances are remarkable."

Mr. Jacobson could not refuse to act on this suggestion; indeed there was a growing interest in the case which led him on; and he would have doubtless sifted it to the bottom, had his own son been the party to whom suspicion pointed. Mr. Rigden was accordingly sent for; and, on his arrival, fully confirmed all that Mr. Sankey had told. "Nay, more," he continued, "never in all my life did I see such an expression as was in the young man's countenance. His cheeks, where they were not be-

smeared with blood, were pale as ashes; and though I called to him by name, he took no more notice of me than if I had been a post. I am always loth to judge my neighbours; but if that poor girl have come by wrong, depend upon it that Giles Solley is in some way or another at the bottom of it."

To summon the constable, and to give him such directions as were not capable of being misunderstood, was now a measure of positive duty. Still, all parties seemed desirous of sparing the feelings of the family; and it was therefore agreed that Messrs Sankey and Rigden should ride forward, and persuade Giles, if possible, to come willingly to Waltham; and that the force even of legal authority should not be appealed to, except in the last extremity. To Crackstakes the gentlemen accordingly rode: but when they found that Giles was missing,—when they learned in what plight he had come home over-night,—when they saw his bloody garments, and heard that he must have fled while the rest of the family were sleeping, suspicion in both their minds became strong conviction. They shook their heads, and told Mrs. Solley that it was their duty to keep her son's frock.

"For what purpose?" demanded the mother in a calm voice, because perfectly unconscious of any cause of alarm. "Giles will be back, I dare say, by and by; and it will be better to get his frock washed and made neat for him against to-morrow."

"Giles will never come back, my good woman," replied the steward, "you may depend upon that; at least till he is brought back. And as to the gaberdine, that must be kept as it is, to serve the ends of justice."

"Of justice!" exclaimed the widow, now greatly agitated; "why what has Giles done to bring him before a justice?"

"I am afraid you will hear that too soon, poor soul!" replied Mr. Rigden. "But in the mean while, you must allow us to search for him through the premises; and here in good time comes the constable, though, indeed, I do not apprehend any opposition from you or Dick."

Again the widow implored them to tell the worst at once, and again they evaded the question; but the constable, who now entered, was not so delicate.

"For the matter is that," said he, "I dare to say Giles is as innocent as the babby that 's

unborn; but you see, the thing is as this; Mary Tapsal, her as he keeps company with, is a missing, you see. Nobody can't find her anywhere; and Giles was the last that was seen in her company. And, God knows, I don't say it's true—I don't believe it,—but this here blood on his gaberdine, and him missing, and her missing—you see it's all very suspicious like. We wants Giles just to clear himself like, and if you knows where he is to be found,—Lord deliver us—the woman's dead."

And dead she was, at least for the moment. The bare possibility of such a charge being brought against Giles—the bare possibility that an unfortunate concatenation of circumstances might tell against him—the bare possibility of her son's danger, perhaps his disgraceful end, went through her brain like a rifle-ball, and she fell prone to the earth. As to his guilt, of that she did not think,—she had not time to think of it; and if the contrary had been the case, she would not have given the idea an admission into her mind for worlds. But there was consciousness of fearful hazard, of imminent, irresistible, deadly peril, which smote her as with a deadly sickness, and took away all command over her faculties. She was carried to bed in such a

state as I cannot undertake to describe, while her unwelcome visitors continued a search which ended in disappointment.

While these scenes were enacting at Crackstakes, all Waltham was in an uproar. The servant lad, having ascertained the fact of Giles's flight, hurried back to communicate what he had learned, in his own style; and not in the workshops only, but in the fields themselves, all labour was suspended. Forth from their dwellings rushed men, women, and children, all clamorous in their demands to be informed of every particular. One was sure no good would come of these secret meetings. Another suspected that there was a cause why Mary should be made away with; yet exclaimed against the barbarity of the miscreant who could first ruin and then murder her. A third had seen Giles Solley as he rushed through the street; and if ever Cain had his facsimile upon earth, Giles that night presented it. But where was the body? had it been found? had it been sought for?—it must be somewhere. Perhaps he had cast it into the mill-dam. In a moment there was a rush to the spot. The miller let off the water; the bottom of the dam was exposed; but there was no body among the mud. It was

at this juncture that Tom Overy came up, whom all the hubbub had not previously roused out of his late slumber. Tom looked very pale —there was an uneasy flutter in his eye, and his hand shook even more than it was wont to do after a night's debauch.

"Have you heard the news, Tom?—have you heard the news?" asked scores of voices at once.

"No—what news?"

"Why, that Giles Solley has made away with Mary Tapsal, and is fled no one knows whither."

"Giles Solley!" exclaimed Tom, while a deep crimson overspread his cheeks; "what proof is there of that?"

"Oh, the best proof in the world. He was seen last night, all covered with blood, rushing out of the churchyard; and this morning, when Mr. Rigden and the constable and others went to take him, he was gone. But they have got his bloody frock to bear witness against him if he should be taken; and as soon as we find the body, we will all to a man go in pursuit of him."

Tom's colour went and came as he listened to this wild tale. His chest heaved and he la-

bound for breath, while, after clenching his teeth firmly together, he said—

"By G—! then it was him and her I saw together at the bottom of the meadow below the churchyard. They went into the osier plantation beyond, and I never saw them after."

Instantly a shout arose, "To the osier-bed, to the osier-bed!" Tom was commanded to put himself at their head, and he did so. "Out of which part of the churchyard did he come?" demanded he of Mr. Sankey, who was now returned from Crackstakes.

"Out of the little gate directly opposite to my hall-door," was the reply.

"Then we will enter there." They did so: they narrowly examined the path, and found here and there a drop of blood. Beyond the north angle of the tower, however, the marks ceased; but that was a circumstance which men so excited were little likely to regard, when following up, what they believed to be, another and a surer clue. Under Tom's guidance they accordingly moved on, till they had passed out by another wicket, and found themselves on a raised path leading through the meadow towards the osier-bed. Slowly and deliberately they pursued it, stopping from

time to time to examine, and discovering, or persuading themselves that they had discovered, traces of two pair of feet in the sandy soil. But as they approached the osier-bed, Tom's fortitude seemed to fail:—he could not believe anything of the kind of Giles; Giles was too good a lad to fall into such a crime all at once: and besides, if he were escaped, where was the use of prosecuting the search further. Of course nobody would listen for a moment to such arguments; and when Tom stopped short outside the osiers, the only result was that he stood alone. The rest, with Mr. Sankey as their leader, pushed on. There were the tracks of two people among the willows. By-and-by these became more remarkable, for it seemed as if the osiers had been trampled with violence, and that some scuffle had taken place among them. And now one shrieked aloud as he pointed to a clot of dark blood, which was coagulated, not far from where he stood. There was a sinking sensation in all bosoms, which urged them for an instant to pause; but it was only for an instant.

"I am afraid we are on the right scent, neighbours," exclaimed Mr. Rigden; "for there, in that bog, the soil looks as if it had been newly moved; and see, there lies a handker-

chief torn, and a glove—a small glove, close beside it."

The men sprang upon the little tumulus. They had no spades; but the miller, by chance, had brought his weed-cutter, and they used it instead of one. The soil was quickly removed; and there, upon her back, disfigured by a hideous gash, which had wellnigh severed the head from the body, lay all that had been mortal of Mary Tapsal. A shrill cry gave notice that the corpse was found, and then there was perfect silence.

CHAPTER VII.

A CORONER'S INQUEST.

"This is sad work, neighbours! sad work, indeed!" Mr. Sankey at length exclaimed, "but the hand of God is apparent in it. Blood never has been hidden, and never will be. How mysterious is the power which guided us hither! and how striking the chain of evidence that lays the guilt on the right shoulders. Well, there is but one thing more to do. The poor girl must be carried up to the street, and the coroner hold his inquest; after which we must all bestir ourselves like men to trace the murderer to his hiding-place."

The crowd indicated their assent to these propositions rather by their actions than their words. One or two ran back to the workhouse for the bier belonging to that establishment; while the rest drew the corpse carefully from its slimy bed, and rested it upon a drier part of

the plantation. And now it was that proofs more and more remarkable were afforded of the kind of violence which must have been used towards her. There was the mark of a blow inflicted on the side of the head, as if by some flat instrument, which crushing in the skull must have deprived the ill-fated creature of all power of further resistance. The windpipe was completely severed, and the very cartilages of the spine divided. On examining the ground, moreover, it became evident enough that she must have fallen, and received her last wound, at the point where the blood was first discovered; and that the assassin had afterwards dragged her to the ditch, into which he had cast her. Nor was this all that an investigation of the osier-bed brought to light. Lying apart from the ensanguined spot, as if it had been either cast from the hand, or accidentally dropped, lay a small hammer, similar to that which cobblers are accustomed to use, with a short handle, a heavy head, and a broad and a narrow extremity to the top. A spade was likewise found, apparently hidden among the osiers; on the handle of which were stamped the letters G. L.

"Here is more proof that Heaven's eye is

never closed upon the homicide," exclaimed Mr. Rigden; "that spade and hammer were doubtless used for this unholy job; and if a link should be wanting to complete the chain, without doubt they will afford it."

So saying, he took possession of both implements, and, after a fruitless search for the knife, turned his attention to the body. For the persons who had gone for the bier were by this time returned, bringing in their train whosoever of the inhabitants of Waltham had previously lingered at home; and Mary's remains being lifted on the shoulders of four men, the procession, if such it may be termed, set out for the workhouse.

No sooner was the result of the examination of the osier-bed communicated to him, than Mr. Jacobson despatched a person on horseback for the coroner; and as the latter resided at no great distance from Waltham, he was soon upon the spot. The swearing in of the jury followed of course, and in the great room of the workhouse the inquest was held. There occurred little in the earlier progress of this inquiry which seems to demand notice. The curate, the curate's wife, the father of the girl, the curate's housemaid, were all called upon,

and all gave precisely the same sort of evidence which they had given when less formally examined; while the statements of Mr. Sankey, of Mr. Rigden, and others, were well calculated to confirm suspicions that were already rife. Last of all came Tom Overy; who, by what motive impelled it was hard to say, made no effort to take his place in the room till summoned; and who, when summoned, appeared willing to turn his back upon a spectacle which, to say the truth, was abundantly shocking. His testimony, however, being justly regarded as even more important than that of the rest, was gone into with even greater solemnity; and the following is an outline of the manner in which it was given:

"You were out last night," said the coroner, "and returned home by way of the osier-bed. You will be so good as tell these gentlemen where you spent the evening, and what it was that you saw on your return home."

Tom looked very pale, but his voice did not falter while he answered: "I went last night to see a friend at Grove, which lies, you know, across the river. I stayed with her till about ten o'clock, and crossed the ferry immediately afterwards. As I passed the osier plantation,

about half-past ten — or it might be eleven — I met two people, a man and a woman, walking towards it. I wished them good night, but they did not answer me; and as I supposed they were about some business of their own, I took no further notice. The woman's dress I could not distinguish; but the man wore a gaberdine, and I think it was a green one."

"When I saw Giles Solley come out of the churchyard," interrupted Mr. Sankey, "it had not struck nine."—"And when he passed the forge it wanted a quarter of an hour of nine," added Mr. Rigden; "for it so happened that I had my watch in my hand at the moment."

"Well, well, I can't be sure as to the time," said Overy, a deep hectic passing over his cheek. "It may have been nine that I heard, and not ten: as I let myself in, I thought it had been much later."

"It couldn't be nine," exclaimed the shrill voice of Overy's landlady; "for I didn't go to bed till half-past nine; and you wasn't at home at that hour anyhow."

"And the gaberdine," interposed Mr. Jacobson; "Giles's gaberdine is here; and it is white, not green or any other dark colour."

"Really, gentlemen," cried Tom, while a slight shudder ran through his frame, "the whole business is so shocking, that I may have mistaken both the time of night and the dress that the man wore when I met him. All that I can say is, that as I was returning from Grove, I saw two people near the osier-bed, who refused to return my salutation, and that the man wore a gaberdine, but whether it was white or green I will not take upon me to swear, because the night was without a moon and cloudy."

"The night was without a moon certainly," observed Mr. Sankey, "when I left the street at half-past nine; but the stars shone so clear, that I think I should have known whether a man's frock were light or dark of colour at twenty rods' distance."

"When I passed the man and woman," answered Tom, "they were under the shade of the willows; and that made me say the night was cloudy."

"You are quite sure then," demanded the coroner; "that somewhere between nine and eleven you met two people going as if towards the osier-bed?"

"Quite," answered Tom; "indeed you may

say, between half-past eight and half-past nine; for I didn't go straight home after I passed them. It was near eleven before I went to bed: and as I had taken rather more beer than did me good, that will account for my being confused as to the precise time."

The cobbler's hammer and the spade were now brought forward, and the coroner desired to be informed whether any person present could trace them to an owner. There was no difficulty about the latter, for Mr. Jacobson instantly claimed it. It must have been taken out of his tool-house at the bottom of the garden, and he now recollected that having occasion to use it two days ago, he had sought but was unable to find it. Nor was the hammer long a mystery.

"Why, Tom," said an old shoemaker that lived next door to Overy, "'tis the same I lent thee three weeks ago; and by the same token I asked thee for it thrice, and thou always put me off."

Tom caught it eagerly up, and exclaimed, "It is the same, by G——. And sorry am I to say, that this more and more connects Giles Solley with this bloody deed; for I lent that hammer a fortnight ago to his brother Dick,

and I have never seen it from that day to this."

A sort of groan ran through the hall; for the sharp end of the hammer was stained with blood, and some of the hairs from the murdered woman's scalp, still stuck to it.

"Richard Solley must be sent for," said the coroner, and he was sent for; neither did anything of importance occur during the interval, for Tom having, as it seemed, answered to the satisfaction of all present, requested permission to withdraw. It was granted, subject however to the condition that as soon as Dick Solley arrived he would return: and when Dick did arrive he was ready to confront him. Dick admitted, without an attempt at evasion, that happening to want the hammer for some purposes of his own, he had taken it out of Tom Overy's lodgings; "but I did not keep it three days," continued he; "as soon as Giles found out from whom I had had it, he took it away from me, and told me afterwards that he had returned it."

"I will swear that he never returned it to me," said Overy in a firm tone.

There seemed now but one more step to be taken, namely, to clear the apartment for a

brief space, in order that a medical gentleman might examine the body; and his report, after the court met again, confirmed the worst suspicions that had been entertained. This fact, added to all the rest, seemed to bring the affair to an issue.

The countenances of the jury plainly indicated that their minds were well made up as to the verdict which it would be necessary to give; and the coroner proceeded, in consequence, to sum up the evidence. He did so with great judgment and impartiality. He alluded strongly to the incongruities which had appeared in the statements of a principal witness, both as to time, and the colour of the suspected party's clothes; and entreated the jury, if they had doubts on other grounds, to give him the full benefit of this seeming contradiction. "At the same time, gentlemen," continued he, "I am bound to confess, that, according to my view of the case, appearances are strongly against Giles Solley. He is seen last night, by several persons, coming out of the churchyard covered with blood, and apparently labouring under violent excitement. He makes no reply to their salutations; he hurries home, and though I have abstained from questioning his mother and

nearest relatives as to his behaviour there, we have it, at second hand, that it was very extraordinary. But what is most remarkable of all, he is nowhere to be found. This morning, when his relatives seek him in his chamber, they find the horrid garment lying in the middle of the floor, but the man himself is gone. Then, again, we have the evidence of Martha Morrice, a young person in Mr. Jacobson's service, that he was in the habit of keeping company with the deceased; and, finally, the surgeon tells us, that the unfortunate young creature is in the family way. Now, under these circumstances, I think that you can hardly fail of coming to the conclusion that this most cruel murder has been committed for one purpose only, and that the same miscreant who robbed the girl of her innocence has taken away her life. The father of the unborn child has slain the mother, and with her the fruits of his own unholy passion. Now, it is just possible that Giles Solley may not be the seducer of that girl; we have nothing before us to give the certainty that he is; and, were this made evident, strong as are the suspicions on other accounts attaching to him, I should experience some hesitation in advising you to return against

him the verdict of wilful murder. But as he is the only man of whom any mention is made as having ever kept her company, the probabilities, to use no stronger term, are all against it. And that which will, I am sure, weigh most upon your minds is, what has become of him? If he be an innocent man, why get out of the way? If there be no weight of blood upon his conscience, why abandon his home, so soon after his father's decease, while his affairs are yet in so unsettled a state; and, above all, in a manner so mysterious. In spite, therefore, of Thomas Overy's misapprehensions,—misapprehensions which I am sorry to believe originate in habits of dissipation, which he cannot too soon relinquish,—I think that you have but one course to pursue, and that you will make such a finding as shall enable justice to be satisfied in a case as atrocious as has ever come under my notice during twenty years' service as coroner for this county."

After an address like this, only one verdict could be anticipated. The jury did not so much as withdraw; but having whispered one to another for a second or two, the foreman rose, and announced that he and his fellows were satisfied.

"And what is your verdict, gentlemen?"

"Wilful murder against Giles Solley."

A second deep groan followed this announcement: but there was neither shriek nor other mark of sympathy; for Dick had withdrawn as soon as his evidence had been taken, and there was no one to take the guilty man's part. Indeed, in the crime of murder there is something so revolting to all human feeling, that he who is pronounced guilty seems to lose every hold upon the compassion of his fellow-creatures. When, therefore, the coroner, after commending the jury for their patience, their discrimination, and their judgment, proceeded to make out his warrant, there was no lack of offers to assist in the apprehension of the murderer; and long ere the sun went down, every grove, thicket, lone house, or other probable place of concealment in the neighbourhood, had undergone a search. But of the homicide not a trace could be discovered. All night they sought him in vain. With the dawn of the morrow, fresh pursuers were afield; and as the rumour had already extended to the nearest towns, both inland and coastward, there also hundreds of eyes were busy. Next came the printing of handbills, which contained a de-

scription of the ruffian's person, with an offer of rewards of one hundred, and two hundred, pounds for his capture. And last of all, the office at Bow-street being applied to, the name of Giles Solley took its place in the Police Gazette. But far and near, in the interior and by the sea-side, all attempts to track his flight came to nothing, till at the close of three weeks the excitement began to abate, and with it men's eagerness of chase relaxed. With respect to the unhappy object of his crime, she was committed to the dust amid the hearty commiseration of all classes; for it is the good fortune of those who have gone astray and fallen a victim to their own vices invariably to attract a large share of public sympathy. Nevertheless, there were not wanting mothers who pointed to the grave of the murdered woman as to a beacon which it behoved their own daughters to observe; and if the name of Giles Solley lay like a curse on all tongues, that of Mary Tapsal was sometimes used as a warning.

"Well, well," said the old people, after the search had fairly been given up, "he has got out of the way for the present; but don't you imagine that he will escape in the end. The

Scripture says, 'Whoso sheddeth man's blood, by man shall his blood be shed;' and the Scripture never yet deceived any one. He who cut that poor girl's throat will, sooner or later, be brought to justice; for innocent blood cries to Heaven, and its voice pierceth into the clouds!"

CHAPTER VIII.

CHANGE OF CIRCUMSTANCES.

The excitement and bustle attendant on occurrences so tragical had totally obliterated, both at Crackstakes and in Waltham, all recollection of Giles Solley's application for leave to retain the farm. When he quitted home so mysteriously, no answer had indeed been received to his letter, neither did any arrive till two days afterwards; and when it did come, Mrs. Solley was too much engrossed by cares of a darker and deeper character to pay much regard to it. She only saw that it contained a direct denial of her son's petition, and that the language in which it was couched differed very widely from any which the petitioners had taught themselves to expect; for Lord Brambling not only refused to permit his correspondent to inhabit Crackstakes one hour beyond Michaelmas day, but spoke of the application which was

thus rejected as a piece of unparalleled presumption. Giles was accused, moreover, very shortly, but very sternly, of making a great deal too free with the characters of his betters; and warned that no man ever throve who adopted such methods for advancing his own fortune. But all this, which, under other circumstances, would have preyed upon the widow's peace of mind, was now regarded as nothing. Her thoughts were too full of Giles — of the horrible offence of which he stood accused — of the strong suspicions that attached to him, and of the uncertainty of his own fate, to leave either leisure or space for the intrusion of less harrowing sources of uneasiness. The sole proceeding, therefore, after perusing his lordship's letter, was to fold it up again, rather mechanically than with deliberation, and to lay it by in the old linen-chest among other papers which had been deposited there during several generations.

She had scarcely done so, when Mr. Sankey, who, it appeared, had likewise heard from his noble employer by the same post, arrived at Crackstakes. He had never been a favourite with the widow and her late husband, either because he assumed over them a kind of superi-

ority which they were unwilling to admit, or because they imagined that he did so; and his conduct towards Giles subsequently to his father's death had not tended to remove the evil impression. But his manner during this visit was all that could be conceived of kind and commiserating. He spoke with equal feeling and delicacy of the misfortunes which had overtaken the family. He expressed an earnest hope that Giles might yet be discovered, and succeed in clearing himself from the stain which attached to him; and concluded by avowing his great regret that any such rash step should have been taken by the young man as that which had called forth, as he understood, a rebuke from Lord Brambling. What was done, however, could not be undone; and Giles himself had, he was afraid, placed an insuperable bar between his mother and the gratification of her wishes. Yet upon the whole he was inclined to think that things had turned out for the best. Richard was by far too young to undertake the care of a business; and it was quite clear that harassed as she now was by griefs of so serious a nature, it would not be in her power to assist his inexperience. He therefore would advise her to submit quietly to his lordship's decision;

and he now made her an offer of a neat cottage on his own farm, with a cow's grass, which she could pay for by taking charge of his dairy; while he pledged himself that Dick should never want a day's work, nor the younger children such employment as they might be fit for. There is a power in sorrow to soften the heart as well as to bend the spirit, and Mrs. Solley acceded to his propositions with tears of gratitude; and as the propositions themselves were made in all sincerity, (no matter what motive impelling,) the poor widow, when she thanked him for his unlooked-for kindness, offered him a recompense to which he was justly entitled.

I pass over the few and uninteresting events that occurred at Crackstakes during the interval between bean-sowing and harvest. They were not of such a nature as to require comment, except that they pretty well confirmed the opinion which Mr. Sankey had given of Dick's inability to carry on a farm. What authority, indeed, could a youth of seventeen years of age exercise over his mother's servants? and what else was to be expected of himself, except that, when the impression that had been made, first by his father's death, and next by his brother's flight, wore off, he should become

much more attached to play than to work? For the first time throughout a space of nearly two centuries, the weeds at Crackstakes wellnigh overtopped the corn. If a high wind came and threw down a set of hop-poles, they were permitted to lie on the ground till the plant had begun to mould,—and more than once the very horses suffered neglect in the stable, and the pigs in the stye. For Dick, good-hearted, but easy, docile, and possessing a keen relish for pleasure, forgot the promise which he had given to Giles, and resumed his ancient intimacies; and though not yet admitted as a member of the "Free-and-easy," he soon became a frequent guest at the club-table over which Tom Overy presided.

His mother saw what was going on, and endeavoured by appeals to his feeling and his judgment to restrain it; and at first her appeals were not without their effect. But Dick got gradually more and more within the vortex, and at last treated both complaint and remonstrance with contempt. He was too old to be kept under now by his mother; he was the best judge of what suited his own condition; and, if she persisted in annoying him, he would leave her altogether, and find a place for him-

self. So circumstanced, the widow had little pleasure at Crackstakes; and, when Michaelmas came, she made ready to abandon it, almost without regret. I do not mean to say that she experienced no pang when the auction day arrived, and the stock which had so long constituted all the wealth of an honest family passed into strange hands. On the contrary, the jokes that were cracked by the buyers, with the facetious recommendations of the auctioneer, fell upon her ear like discordant notes in music; and more than once her tears mingled with the liquor which it was her business to prepare for her guests. And when all had been cleared off, and there remained only such articles of household furniture as it was judged expedient to remove to the new dwelling, she walked through the half-empty chambers like one walking in a dream. But after this was done, and she found herself settled in a cottage, which, though small, fully deserved the character which Mr. Sankey had given it, her spirits in some degree revived, and she thanked Providence that there was yet a home for the houseless, even while she wept to think that her first-born was not present to share it.

Allusion was made a short time ago to the

reviving intimacy between Dick Solley and Tom Overy. This did not, indeed, occur immediately after the discovery of Mary Tapsal's murder; for Dick, as well as his mother, had received an impression from his proceedings at the inquest, that Tom desired, rather than otherwise, to implicate Giles in the crime. But as weeks and months rolled on, the pliable mind of Dick gradually permitted the suspicion to wear out, till in the end it was completely erased. for Tom appeared to court his society. The one never visited the village without being joined by the other, who seemed anxious to do him all imaginable little favours, and who, without once directly alluding to events that were past, took care to insinuate on all convenient opportunities a thousand reasons why the absentee should not be condemned unheard. A lad of Dick's temperament could not resist advances so artfully made, more especially as there was as great superiority in point of age as in point of skill on Tom's part; and a good deal to the surprise of all, and very much to the regret of many, the two became ere long inseparable companions.

Meanwhile the habits and general demeanour of Overy himself underwent no change for

the better. He had always been what is called fond of company; he appeared now unwilling to be a moment alone. His trade was more and more neglected every day. To serious topics of conversation he would never so much as pretend to listen; but in ribald jests he took especial delight, and was admitted by all his acquaintances to excel in the use of them. Even in the midst of these, however, not less than when plying his needle, fits of abstraction would come upon him; and the colour, now rapidly deepening in consequence of his immoderate addiction to strong liquors, would desert his cheeks. Nay, there were times when a companion might address him without receiving any reply, notwithstanding that his eye rested with a fixed stare all the while on the speaker's face. It was remarked, moreover, that instead of dividing his assiduities, as it were, between the public-house and his gallantries, the latter were wholly omitted. Tom never failed now to make his appearance in the Black Dog so soon as the company began to assemble, and he never quitted it to return home except in a state of beastly intoxication. As a matter of course, both his health and his resources soon began to fail him, for the

mornings which succeeded such nights were utterly useless; nay, existence itself could not have been endured except for the stimulant that was applied to restore the shattered nerves to tone. In one word, Tom had always been considered a wild lad; but he was now looked upon by the respectable inhabitants of Waltham as a ruined man, destitute of conduct, destitute of character, destitute of principle; yet so clever and so agreeable withal, that even of those who condemned, there were several that courted his society.

From what has been said of old Solley's habits it has probably been conjectured, that if he had not saved anything, he was, at all events, free from incumbrances at his decease. The case was so; and his widow found herself in consequence, after the dead and live stock had been sold off, mistress of a sum very little short in amount of two hundred pounds. Savings-banks were in the year 1813 unknown; but the price of corn was then at its height, and the credit of farmers, especially of such as occupied large holdings, was boundless. She was therefore very glad when Mr. Sankey proposed to become her banker, allowing her interest at the rate of five per cent.; and already

the day was fixed when, after getting in all the little debts, she should deposit her small fortune in his hands. But this arrangement did not, it appeared, meet with her son's approbation: he had a bad opinion of Mr. Sankey; he had his own reasons for saying so: indeed, he would go so far as to assert that Mr. Sankey had, after all, played them false in the matter of the farm; for Tom Overy had told him that, to his knowledge, Mr. Sankey had prejudiced my lord against him, and no dependence could be put on a man who could act so basely.

"And how comes Tom Overy to know anything about it?" demanded his mother; "since I find you still making a companion of that profligate."

"Oh, never you mind that, mother. Tom may be a little wild; but, as Giles said, he has a good heart at bottom: and Tom is a knowing fellow, that can see as far into a millstone as his neighbours."

"I am much mistaken, Dick, if he don't see through you at all events, and make of you a tool for the attainment of his own purposes. And, pray, what would you do with the money?"

"Why, keep it ourselves, to be sure; won't it be safe in the linen-chest?—or can't we bury it under the hearth? Suppose father's words were to come true, and these gentlemen farmers break up after all,—who would give us back our two hundred pounds then?"

"And suppose any accident were to happen; the house to be burned, or robbed, or I don't know what else,—where would our money be then?"

"Oh, that 's all stuff; Crackstakes was neither burned nor robbed, and why should Sheerwater?"

"Mr. Sankey has never failed yet, and why should he now?"

"Well, well, mother, you shall never have my consent to lend your children's money to a man who has not been your children's friend."

"You forget, Dick, that by your father's will I am not obliged to consult my children in the matter. Whatever there is of property is mine while I live, and I may do with it what I like."

"Just as you please, mother; just as you please: but if I am to have no voice in the management of our affairs, I don't see what use I am to be of at home."

"Oh, Dick!" cried his mother, her firmness giving way under excited feeling; "it was not thus that Giles used to speak to me, nor you neither when Giles was at home. But since you took up again with that bad man, who did more to bring your brother into trouble than all the world besides, you are entirely altered. Oh, that Giles had never left me!"

"Mother," answered the young man, forcibly suppressing his remorse by giving the reins to a worse temper, "it's no use your constantly casting Giles in my teeth, or lashing out against Tom Overy. Giles has at least not carried a very good name away with him, and the less we say about him the better; and as to Tom Overy, I'm d—d if I give up his company for you, or for anybody else."

So saying, the young man flung out of the house, hastened down to Waltham, found his friend Tom at the shop-window, invited him out to take a walk, and adjourned with him to the Black Dog. Their carouse that night was deep and long continued, and Dick Solley was pronounced by the assembled party a most excellent fellow. He was formally admitted a member of the club, and became liable to his

entrance fee. He sang his obscene song when it came to his turn; he told his profane story when required to tell it; and rapped out his oaths as often and as broadly as any person present. And when at last the hour of breaking up arrived, he reeled from the tap-room not less drunk than the most drunken; and taking it for granted that his mother's door would be shut against him, staggered home to Tom's lodgings, and there spent the morning—for the night season was long over.

CHAPTER IX.

HUCKSTERING.

When a young man, who has attained to the age of eighteen, fairly gives himself up to the guidance of a depraved companion of three or four and twenty, whatever influence his widowed mother may have once exercised over him is soon broken through. The scene which I described in the last chapter as occurring once, began to occur, in Dick's case, periodically. To be sure, he went to his work in the fields by day; and Mr. Sankey, though the two hundred pounds were not committed to his keeping, did not forget his pledge to employ him. It may be true, indeed, that for this he deserved small thanks; because, in 1813 and 1814, the demand for labour was everywhere greater than the supply, and farmers were very ready to shut their eyes at a few irregularities in their men's conduct rather

than incur the hazard of losing their services. But the consequences were, a steady weekly earning, of which at first the whole,—by-and-by the larger portion,—then the half,—and latterly a fraction, went to the maintenance of the family; while the profits of little Molly's exertions, in crow-keeping, weeding, &c. sufficed to make up whatever deficiency might occur. During several months, therefore, Mrs. Solley, whatever of mental distress she might suffer from a contemplation of her son's misconduct, was not put to it for the necessaries or even the comforts of life; and Dick, when he returned to his dinner, had on all occasions a comfortable meal prepared, of which he partook, always in haste, generally in silence.

Throughout the two-and-twenty years of her married life, Mrs. Solley had been accustomed to see every day ended, in her little circle, by an act of family worship. The conduct of her eldest son, during the brief period of his reign, gave her the pleasant assurance that while he lived the good practice would not be omitted; and even Dick, young as he was, had adhered to it for some time previous to the removal from Crackstakes. But all that was now at an end. Of Dick she saw no more after the hours

of labour ceased, till they met again next morning at breakfast; and his pale brow and shaking hand made her then too surely aware of the manner in which, for the most part, the night had been spent. For among other privileges on which he insisted, and which he eventually contrived to extort, Dick obtained possession of the key; so that he was able to let himself out or in at all hours, without disturbing any one. Alas! Sheerwater was not to the poor widow what Crackstakes had been, where many an hour she spent in secret weeping, while she watched over the slumbers of her yet innocent children, and prayed to God, either that they might continue so, or else die before they were corrupted.

I spoke in the last chapter of a discussion which occurred between Dick and his mother relative to the best mode of disposing of the proceeds of the sale of the effects. It is hardly necessary to add, that though apparently worsted on that occasion, Dick gained his end at last. The money was not intrusted to Mr. Sankey's keeping. Having been put up in a pocket-book, the notes (for paper-money of local issue was then the current coin of the realm) were safely deposited in the linen-chest, which stood in

the widow's chamber, and of which she always carried the key; and the family, without any ostensible reason, were thereby impoverished to the amount of ten pounds a year. But it was not to accomplish this alone that Dick made so determined a stand against the lending system. He discovered by degrees, that if the whole, or even a part, of the treasure were embarked in some trade, it would be far more advantageously disposed of than in the chest; and he began to hold conferences with his mother on the subject. "To be sure, he had not learned any trade,—he was neither a tailor nor a shoemaker;—and as to a shop, there were too many of them in the parish already. But he fancied that he was something of a judge of stock, whether pigs, sheep, cattle, or horses; and he was sure that a great deal was to be made in the jobbing line: at all events it was worth trying. The Easter fair was on the morrow; and if his mother would only let him have fifty pounds, he was confident that he might make some purchases, out of which a handsome profit would be turned by-and-by; and he was quite ready to give her his note of hand, if indeed she thought it necessary to demand any security from him."

Mrs. Solley was not blind either to the probable advantages or the risks of such a system of trading, even when carried on by persons of experience. It might succeed, it often did succeed; and success, when attained, was for the most part ample. But it might likewise fail; and exposed as the jobber was to every imaginable temptation of excess, and to every conceivable hazard of deception, failure in the case of a very young or a very wild speculator, was almost sure to occur. She did not, therefore, enter into Dick's views with the alacrity which he anticipated, but rather strove to divert him from his purpose by speaking of the possible return of times when the contents of the chest might be laid out on stock for a new farm. Dick, however, scouted the idea of such a thing. "Don't you see that it is becoming more and more impossible every day? Why, there is not now one small farm left in all the parish, whereas even since my memory there were several. No, no, mother; we must either be content to drudge on as day-labourers, or we must make an effort in some other way to better our condition; and I cannot see a nicer opening than that of which I have just spoken. Tom

Overy is a monstrous shrewd fellow, and he says——"

"Nay, now Dick, if you be acting on the advice of Tom Overy, I am more than ever convinced that you are going to do wrong. Tom Overy, even if he were not a worthless vagabond, which he is, is a tailor by trade; and what can he know about stock, or jobbing, or the chances of loss or gain?"

"I will thank you, mother, to speak more respectfully of my friend," answered Dick, sharply; "he is no more a worthless vagabond than I am; and if he were so a thousand times over, that is no reason why I should refuse to take a good hint from him, should he chance to drop one."

"Surely not, Dick, provided it be a good one. But you know where it is written, that 'men do not gather figs of thorns, nor grapes of thistles,' and that 'a bitter fountain can never send forth sweet waters.'"

"Bah! that's all gammon; we had enough of that, and more than enough, while father was alive: and we know a thing or two for ourselves now that he's gone. But the point to be settled is this:—Are you willing to advance

the fifty pounds, or must I borrow it elsewhere; for to the Easter fair I am determined to go as a purchaser, and nobody shall hinder me!"

"Dick, you will break my heart if you go on thus. Who has taught you to make light of the Word of God? Is that one of Tom Overy's lessons, too?"

"I didn't make light of the Word of God," answered Dick sullenly; for, dissipated as he had become, he was not, at least in his sober hours, a positive blasphemer; "I only meant to say that we were not then discoursing about the Scriptures, but about pigs and oxen; and that there was a good opening for me to benefit both you and myself, if I had but the money."

"Well then, Dick, I tell you that I can't consent to give to you what is not mine to give. You hindered me from putting out the money to use, where I am sure that it would have been safe; but I am not going to let you throw it away on speculations which will never end in good."

"Very well, mother; again I say, please yourself: but if you think to stop me by such means from embarking in an honest business,

all that I have to say is, you are most confoundedly mistaken! I know where to get credit, and I will get it, too; but if you have any share in my profits, blow me tight! You may live upon your dirty two hundred pounds, and welcome; but you shall have no more of my earnings!"

Again Dick sallied from his home swelling with indignation, beneath which lurked the consciousness of bad designs. Not on this occasion did he and his bosom friend adjourn at once to the Black Dog. On the contrary, the latter, who was waiting for him at the bottom of the lane, no sooner beheld the expression of his countenance than he guessed the result, and a new and not less characteristic dialogue began between them.

"What, she won't fork out, then! Ah, I supposed as much. But never mind, Dick, my man: the thing may be managed some other way. I suppose you couldn't get at her key, could you?"

Dick started: he understood at once the meaning of this hint, and his blood stagnated at his heart while he listened to it. Overy was not slow in perceiving that he had overshot the

mark. He therefore continued, in a tone of raillery:—"Because it would be a capital joke to take out the pocket-book and to keep it for a couple of days, and when you gave it back again to show her how very easy it would have been for you, had you felt so disposed, to use all her money, instead of a part, to her advantage. But I suppose that's not to be done; and if it were, it wouldn't serve our purpose for the present. Let's see—what shall we do?"

"I thought you said," replied Dick, restored to confidence by Overy's adroit mode of turning aside his original insinuation, "that some of the higglers would give credit, provided they were assured that the purchaser had money."

"So I did," answered Tom; "and so they will, I make no doubt. But how are we to satisfy them that *you* have money?"

"Why, all the parish knows that father died worth something; and that, at mother's death, if it don't happen sooner, I must get my share."

"Ah, but higglers are not accustomed to wait for dead men's shoes, nor dead women's neither. No, Dick, that won't do at all; but I think I know what will."

"What?" demanded Dick eagerly.

"You must go boldly to the fair, make whatever purchases you fancy, desire the beasts to be driven up to Sheerwater, and promise to pay on delivery. You can be out of the way when they arrive; and as I shall take care to meet the people on their road, and to tell them that you showed me the fifty-pound note that you meant to lay out, they will, I dare say, give you trust for one night at all events. When you go home, you must tell your mother point blank that, unless they be paid for in the morning, you must go to gaol: for I will do more for you than this; I will go home with you, and while you keep the old lady at talk, I will carry off half of them and sell them to a person who I know will give a good price; and so your mother, perceiving that you could not give them back if you were ever so willing, will fork out the dibbs, and you and I will account for my sales when we meet."

Dick closed unhesitatingly with this bright proposal; and the two friends, by way of cementing their union, adjourned to the Black Dog. At Tom's suggestion, however, Dick this night kept himself sober; for if the truth must be told, Tom apprehended, not without reason,

that his friend might let out, when under the influence of liquor, some portion, if not all, of their delectable schemes. Nay more, Dick returned home at an unusually early hour; and though he excused himself from reading the Bible or performing family worship, he appeared in other respects so much like what he used to be, that his mother's fears of his ultimate ruin received at least a momentary interruption. Not a word was said touching the jobbing scheme on either side; and the parting, when the hour of slumber came, might almost be said to have been affectionate. But Dick was in all this evincing nothing more than the aptitude with which he had studied in the school of Tom Overy. His were hypocritical professions of love; for on the morrow he was up betimes, dressed, breakfasted, and on his way to the fair.

"Don't you go to work to-day, Dick?" said his mother beseechingly, as his figure darkened the doorway.

"I think not," was the reply; but it was uttered so hurriedly, that the poor woman scarcely understood it; and she resumed her accustomed duties, ignorant of her son's designs. In due time, however, these developed

themselves. About noon one person arrived driving a couple of swine before him; by-and-by came a boy with a cow and calf; then followed a small flock of ten or twelve prime fat tags; and, last of all, a blood filly.

"In the name of fortune," demanded the widow, "what is to be done with all these? To whom do they belong, and where do they come from?"

"As to the matter of that," replied the parties questioned, "it is none of our business what you do with them. Your son has bought them at the fair, and we expected to find him here before us to pay for them; but as he is not at home, we are willing to leave the payment till to-morrow. If you will show us where to put them, we will be glad to get rid of them, for we have more stock in the market."

"Put them," cried she, "I have nowhere to put them. Pray, pray take them away again, for Dick does not want anything of the kind, and has no money to make such purchases."

The men stared at one another, and seemed for a moment irresolute; till one whispering to the rest, they only smiled, and assured Mrs. Solley that they would take their chance of payment. In a word, finding no better pen within

which to enclose them, the animals were driven into her little garden, out of which, in the course of ten minutes, they rooted every vegetable and flower that grew there. It was to no purpose that she protested against the arrangement; the salesmen were resolute, and left her in a state of mind which it would not be easy to describe.

The day wore on, and some time after nightfall Dick made his appearance. He was heated with spirits, excessively irritable, and would not listen to the arguments or entreaties of his mother for a moment. "He told her how it would be beforehand. He had only kept his word, and, so help him God! he would always keep it. The stock was got on credit, to be sure; but he had made a capital bargain, and if she didn't choose to share the risk, she should not share the profit."

It would have been useless to protract discussion with a young man so infatuated. The family accordingly retired to bed; but with the morrow came a new scene to be enacted: the sheep were all gone; the swine, the cow, and the filly alone remained; and the sheep as well as these must be paid for immediately. I need not prolong this portion of

my history. After much hesitation, much remonstrance, much recrimination, and some tears, Dick prevailed. Fifty pounds were given to him out of the common stock; and he entered, with good apparent credit, on a new career of life.

CHAPTER X.

THE JOBBING LINE.

Had all other circumstances favoured him, Dick Solley could have scarce commanded success, owing to the unfortunate period at which he began business. Peace was proclaimed; and with it came a reduction in the prices of agricultural produce of all descriptions, such as no human being seems ever to have anticipated. Corn fell, at a blow, from one hundred to seventy shillings per quarter; sheep, that had been purchased for three pounds in the spring, would not now fetch forty shillings; and cattle, pigs, poultry, wool, tallow, hides, all kept pace with them. The most remarkable change of all, however, was in the price of hops. Many persons had refused to sell in November, because the brokers offered only six-and-twenty pounds; they would have now gladly disposed of all their stock at ten pounds,

had there been any purchasers; but purchasers there were none: and the fruit lay useless, every week losing something of its intrinsic value in the barns and oasts of the grower. As a matter of course, he who had bought at Easter under the idea of selling to advantage at Midsummer, found himself, when the latter period came round, without a market; and unless he chanced to be both a bold speculator and an ample capitalist, he was glad to dispose of his stock at a considerable loss.

To this, the common fate of all traders, Dick Solley was of course liable; and had it been the only misfortune that overtook him, it would have been sufficient to scatter into air all his brilliant anticipations; but it was not the only misfortune which overtook him. His friend Tom Overy had, according to agreement, removed the most marketable portion of his purchases before they were paid for. He had disposed of them likewise, as he himself asserted, to great advantage; but, instead of handing over the proceeds to Dick, he proposed that the latter should admit him into partnership, and that the money then in his possession should be laid out in fresh purchases.

Dick did not, at first, appear to relish this

way of settling accounts. He spoke of the necessity under which he lay of refunding the fifty pounds to his mother, and of the wisdom of doing so out of his earliest profits; and even went so far as to demand from Tom what he could bring in to enlarge the common stock. Tom smiled while he answered:

"I can bring that, Dick, of which you possess little, but without a fair quantity of which no business can thrive. I can keep accounts, which you cannot, at least such accounts as the jobbing line produces; and I have some notion that you won't be the worse of a head to help you, that knows how to concoct schemes and humbug flats."

Dick was not quite sure, at first, how he ought to receive this half-contemptuous reply; but, as I have elsewhere stated, his disposition was as pliable as that of his companion was subtle and designing: the discussion ended, therefore, as might have been expected, in a solemn compact of profit and loss between the negotiating parties.

Having fairly embarked in business for himself, Dick, as in duty bound, ceased to work for Mr. Sankey; and, under the direction of his amiable partner, proceeded to make arrangements

on a scale of becoming magnitude. A couple of meadows were hired at an exorbitant rent, as a place of keep for the cattle; and hay and other fodder was laid in for their maintenance during the winter. This done, and some addition having been made to their stock, the partners proceeded to arrange an equitable division of labour, which, on various accounts, entrusted to Tom the management of the domestic portion of the concern. Thus, while Dick in his tax-cart went about from one market to another, or jobbed at the houses of his customers far and near, Tom stayed at home to keep the books, to feed the beasts, and, whenever a favourable opportunity offered, to sell one or more to any purchaser who might present himself. Nor could anything go on more smoothly than the jobbing trade for the space of nearly six months. It was very true that, from time to time, the knowing ones burnt their fingers. They had to fight up against many obstacles, of which the bad times were not the least formidable; and on several occasions were fain to sell at a loss, rather than consume the fodder by holding back. Yet, as they examined the books every Saturday night, and there was always a balance in their favour, they enter-

tained no doubt of being able to go on, and of realizing a snug profit in the end.

It is not much the custom in conducting agricultural business either to seek or to give protracted credit; and, among jobbers especially, all bargains are supposed to be for ready money. Our young traders so far acted on this principle that they never sold without receiving cash in hand, though in their purchases they might not be quite so particular. To be sure, they professed to stand in no need of trust; neither would they take it in the ordinary way, for if they had not the bank-notes immediately about them, they were always ready to grant bills: but as these were invariably taken up as soon as they became due, an impression rapidly got abroad of their punctuality; for I need not add, that of all classes of persons, none are so ready to believe the best of the solvency of their neighbours and customers as agriculturists. Then, indeed, they found it easy enough, whether their purses happened to be full or empty, to lay in stock of every description; till at last they determined to take higher ground in their calling, and to buy and sell by commission. The consequence was, that Dick began by degrees to enlarge the circle of

his dealings, and to frequent fairs and markets even in Essex ; and as he really was a good judge of stock, more than one of the yeomen round Waltham employed him to act as their agent, and paid him a per-centage for doing so. True, a whisper would occasionally go the round of the parish, that all is not gold that glitters ; and once or twice the firm had applied for a short prolongation of credit : but the times were confessedly getting worse and worse for all persons deriving a subsistence from the fruits of the earth, and it was no wonder if they who had bad debts on their books should now and then prove themselves defaulters.

Michaelmas term was now drawing on, when Dick, who, strange to say, had of late become much more steady in his habits, suggested to his partner that they ought to institute a thorough inspection into the state of the concern. He had, in the course of the last month, made some purchases on an unusually large scale, and the gentleman who employed him expected that a full account would be rendered at Michaelmas-day. Besides, if they should prove to be, as he entertained no doubt they would, very much in credit, he thought that it would be a good thing to enlarge their

premises, which were by far too narrow. Tom readily agreed to go into the whole matter, though at the same time he assured his friend that there was no necessity for taking so much trouble.

"Hadn't they examined the books only last Saturday, and was it not quite clear that, taking into account the value of the stock in hand, they were clear gainers by a hundred pounds and more?"

Dick had no doubt that it was so, yet he did wish to balance the accounts; and the last evening in the current week was fixed upon for the important undertaking.

The eventful evening at length arrived; and Dick, who, though little at home, had behaved of late with something like his wonted attention to his mother, took his evening meal with her and his brother and sister, preparatory to his adjournment to Tom Overy's lodgings. He did not scruple, while at table, to mention the sort of business in which he was going to be engaged, and spoke confidently of the report which he should be enabled by-and-by to bring back. His mother shook her head.

"Now, mother," said Dick, "this is not fair in you at all. Remember how you opposed

the scheme when I first brought it forward; and yet you yourself have allowed since, that it was a wiser one that you anticipated. Why then should you doubt the result of to-night's operations?"

"Because, Dick, I have never had but one opinion on the subject. So far your scheme may have answered that it has kept you pretty much from the "Free-and-easy," and by giving you constant employment has hindered you from becoming a complete sot; but as to your profits, my boy, I have heard of them, to be sure, more than once, but I have never seen them. The fifty pounds that I lent you to begin upon has not yet been paid back."

"Oh! never mind that, mother. Like the talent in the New Testament that made five talents, your fifty has more than trebled itself; and when it is paid back, which will, I hope, be to-morrow, it shall be paid with excellent interest. So don't condemn either me or my scheme till you know the result."

"I don't condemn *you*, Dick, nor even your scheme. It may be, and I trust it will prove, all that you anticipate; but I wish you had a better partner, that's all."

"Mother," said Dick, somewhat sternly—for he was singularly jealous of his partner's reputation,—"it does not become you, who make so much profession of religion, to condemn any man because he may have once deserved censure. It is a long lane that has no turning; and though I allow that Tom likes his glass, I have never seen about him anything to justify a suspicion of his honesty. I am sure of one thing, that without so clever a fellow to help me, I never could have been in the situation that I am in now."

"Well, Dick," said his mother kindly, as her son rose to fulfil his engagement, "I hope it is as you say, and I am sure you would not say so if you did not think it. But whether I be right or wrong, don't be angry with me; for God knows I have but one wish upon earth,—and that is, to see my children thriving and respected."

"No, no! my dear mother," answered Dick, softened at once by this appeal, "I am not angry; it would ill become *me* to be angry with *you*: but you will oblige me very much by ceasing to speak ill of Tom, even if you continue to think it. I am so closely connected with him now, that were all that you suspect

true, I could not break the connexion, so it is no use irritating ourselves by fancying dangers that have no real existence."

There was so much justice in this remark, that Mrs. Solley, though she could not pretend to alter her opinions, promised to be more guarded for the future in her language; and Dick adjourned, light of heart, because pleased with himself and with his home, to the lodgings of Tom Overy.

"You are half-an-hour beyond your time," said Overy, as Dick entered his apartment, "and you know very well that I hate to be kept waiting. There is no pleasure in being alone when one hasn't laid in one's grog, as is my case at this present."

"Why, Tom," said Dick, looking with surprise at his haggard countenance and uneasy air — "I thought it had been in the dark only that you disliked being left alone; the sun has scarce set, and there is light enough for us to get through half our work before we need a candle."

"Light or dark, Dick," answered Overy, doggedly, "there is nothing so odious to me as this, what you call, sober state. One sees a thousand horrid phantoms when one's eyes are

not cleared with a little gin; and one's hand shakes so that it is no easy matter to hold a pen. D— me if I can stand it. Let's go to the Dog, and have a drink first; and when we are steadied a bit, we can return to this cursed job."

"No, Tom," replied Dick; "let's get the job over first; or, if you must have a drink, send to the Dog for a bottle of stuff; and I'll join you in a dram."

The hint was promptly taken. The landlady, hurrying across the way, soon returned with a pint and a half of Hollands, and the friends swallowed a glass or two by way of clearing their heads. Tom, indeed, drank so much, that his partner, who was really anxious to ascertain how their accounts stood, remonstrated with him; but Tom had abstained for several hours, and was, therefore, not in a condition to be easily discomposed. The spirits took no more effect upon him than to brace his nerves and to uncloud his brain; indeed, it seemed as if there only needed this stimulus to restore him to his accustomed superiority over his more cautious companion: for though, at the opening of the scene, Dick had a manifest advantage, it ceased the instant that the spirit of his

partner revived; and when the books were unclosed, a spectator, had such been by, would have discovered that the one was not, and could not fail to be, more or less than the tool of the other.

As they began at page one in the first day-book, and compared each entry as it occurred with the entries in the ledger, the process of going through accounts, which now spread over nearly six months, was both a slow and an irksome one. The accounts themselves, however, seemed to have been kept with extraordinary care, and for a while the balance at the bottom of each leaf was in favour of the concern; but by-and-by, though Dick could not detect anything wrong in the details, the results proved much less satisfactory. He questioned Tom on the subject, and received invariably an answer, which, while it silenced, induced him to apply again and again to the gin-bottle for comfort. Now there was a dead loss of twenty pounds on one purchase; now fifteen had gone to the winds by deaths among the stock; here was a bill for fifty, granted to Andrew Turnstile, which must be met within eight days, but to meet which there were no assets in hand. Dick looked next to their banker's book—for they

had opened an account with Messrs. Waterline, Stamps, and Co.—and ascertained to his surprise and dismay, that they had overdrawn one hundred and ten pounds. To be sure, there was, to set against all this, nine prime bullocks; fifteen year-old tags; three swine, one with a litter of seven pigs; and fodder to the value of nearly four pounds. But the rent of the meadows was due, amounting to five pounds; and Dick had not accounted to Mr. Sankey for the proceeds of a sale which he had effected for him to a considerable amount at the last Ashford market.

"Good God!" exclaimed Dick, not more surprised than unmanned; "what does all this mean? I thought you told me that the balance was greatly in our favour. I thought you had summed up the books every Saturday night."

"And so I did, my dear fellow," was Tom's answer. "Deuce take me if I can account for this state of things at all. To be sure, there is no guarding against deaths; and we have had the worst of times to contend against; but I did not think our concern was so bad as this."

"Why, we are—let me see—one hundred and seventeen pounds worse than we were at

the beginning, besides my liability to Mr. Sankey, and the fifty pounds due to mother."

"Faith! and I believe you have pretty nearly hit the mark," replied Tom carelessly. "Confound it! who could have supposed, considering all the care we have taken, that our first half-year's balance-sheet would have shown such a figure?"

He poured out a glass of gin for his partner as he spoke, and affected to do the same for himself. Dick drank off the poison, but it did not comfort him.

"What are we to do, Tom?" cried he; "I have no particular fancy to go to Maidstone gaol; and yet I don't see how either you or I are to keep out of it."

"Pooh, pooh!" answered Tom, filling his partner's glass again, "things have not come to that pass yet. Many a firm has been in worse circumstances than ours, yet got through after all. If we had but a little ready money to meet the most pressing of these demands, I should have no fear of the result; for, thank God! our credit is excellent, and so long as we keep that up we may go on."

"Ay, if we had," replied Dick, "but where is it?"

"Here, take another glass; and then let us set these books on one side, and consider this matter."

Dick drank; and the effect of potations so often repeated was exactly such as, under like circumstances, it is apt to be. He took after each bumper not a more satisfactory, but a more gloomy view of the state of his own affairs, mixed, however, with an earnest desire, by any method, or at any sacrifice, to retrieve them. Like his companion, he scouted the idea of winding up, and taking advantage of the Insolvent Act. He would not be the laughing-stock of the parish, nor would he consent to let his mother crow over him, as she certainly would do whenever the truth came to be known. No, they must hold on a little longer; and, by some desperate plunge, either get out of the mess at once, or go to the dogs in earnest. But how could they hold on?

"There would have been no question about that to-night, Dick, if your mother had behaved to you as she ought to have done at the outset. Instead of fifty, had she given you the whole two hundred, what a business we might now have had! And even that fifty was given in such a way that no good could come

of it. However, I wish we had a hundred and fifty pounds now; that would put all to rights, I 'll be bound."

"And why shouldn't we get a hundred and fifty pounds?" exclaimed Dick. "I 'll go to mother this instant, and tell her that unless she advances the money I will follow Giles's example, and leave her and the young ones to shift for themselves."

Overy winced a little when Giles's name was mentioned, and a cloud passed over his brow, but it passed very rapidly. "There would be no great good in that," said he, "for I quite mistake your mother's character if she would let you have a farthing. You know it was only by a sort of fraud that you made her fork out the first fifty; and even fraud would not avail now. No, Dick, I am afraid we must break off and go to gaol all for the lack of a hundred and fifty dirty pieces of paper."

"Then may I be d—d to all eternity!" shouted Dick. "She shall give up the money. Am not I father's heir?—am not I the eldest son now, and of age—or nearly of age? She has no right to keep it; and I will have it."

"All that is very true, Dick; but you know as well as I, that you might as well

preach to the winds as try to come over the old woman. No, if it were possible to get at the notes without her finding it out; but that, I suppose, is quite out of the question?"

"No, no, Tom," replied Dick, somewhat sobered by this proposition. "Hang it, I can't stand that! Rob one's own mother!—No, no, Tom, that won't do—at no rate."

"Of course not; I did not suppose it would. I only hinted that, instead of fighting and brawling with the old lady, it might be as well—since you seemed determined to have the money—to get it quietly; always providing that it shall be repaid out of the very first cash that we handled."

"Well, but would not that be robbery to all intents and purposes?" asked Dick doubtingly.

"Why, no; I don't exactly see that," replied his companion. "When a man robs, he takes money or goods without having any intention whatever of restoring them, and he takes them from a stranger. But one's father and mother are in some sort bound to assist one in business; and if we cannot get help from them without causing a quarrel, I think that it is better to borrow quietly than to bully

and bluster for the loan; for it can only be a loan after all."

"Hang it! I don't like the thought of it, neither," rejoined Dick. "But if one were tempted to borrow in this fashion, how could it be done?"

"As for the matter of that," replied Tom, "as I don't suppose you have pluck enough to try, I need not——"

"Pluck!" demanded Dick fiercely,—"who wants for pluck? I have pluck enough to rob on the highway, if necessary; and why should I want pluck to open our own linen-chest?"

"Nay, Dick, mind I don't advise you to do anything of the kind. If you were caught, you never would be able to persuade your mother that you were not going to rob; and, to say the truth, I doubt whether a jury would not be of the same opinion."

"Phew! phew!" exclaimed Dick, now excited beyond the influence of any other feeling than a disinclination to be thwarted or contradicted — "what do I care about all that? I know where the key of the linen-chest is,—mother always carries it in her pocket, and sleeps so sound that I would have no more

difficulty in taking it away from her bedside than I have in swallowing this drop of jackey. Don't talk to me about danger, and juries, and such like trash."

"Dick, I hope you will not do anything of the kind."

"Not do it! d—n me, I'll do it this very night! d—n me, I'll do it this moment! The old lady is fast asleep by this time; and as she always lays her pockets on the chair beside the bed——Come, Tom, have you the courage to go with me?—I'll take the money —you shall receive it—and when the morrow comes we shall be all smooth again."

"I have no objection to see you home, Dick," was the reply; "but as to being concerned in this robbery——"

"Why, you son of a gun!" exclaimed Dick, "did not you yourself assure me, not five minutes since, that it would be nothing of the sort? But never mind; robbery or no robbery, I want a hundred and fifty pounds; I know where they are to be had, and my name's not Dick Solley if I don't get them before I sleep."

He rose as he spoke, and his companion rose with him. They shut up the books and

put them by; and then, sallying forth arm-in-arm, they proceeded towards Sheerwater. No conversation occurred to interrupt the current of their respective thoughts, of whatever nature these might be, till they found themselves in front of the cottage door, and Dick had his pass-key in his hand.

"Now Dick, my lad," whispered Overy, "take my advice, and proceed no farther in this business. Go to bed and sleep upon it. If you be in the same mind to-morrow, we can talk the plan over; but to-night——"

"Just be so good as hold your d—d botheration tongue," replied Dick, "and go round to the back of the house. Take your station under the window nearest to the west gable; and wait there till you see or hear from me again."

Dick, softly unlocking the door, entered as he spoke; while Tom, obeying the directions given, walked round to the back of the house. He had not stood there five minutes when the lattice above was cautiously opened.

"Hist! hist!. Tom,—art there?"

"Yes," was the answer, delivered in an audible whisper.

"Look out then, and catch; and expect me to-morrow immediately after breakfast."

Something dropped from the hand of the speaker, which Tom Overy eagerly caught. It was a pocket-book. He thrust it into his bosom, and without waiting to hear the lattice closed, set off with a wary but rapid step towards the village. There was a slight noise of a hinge turning in its socket, and all was perfectly still.

CHAPTER XI.

WINDING UP AFFAIRS.

The following morning was far advanced ere Dick Solley quitted his chamber; and when he joined his mother in the room which served both as kitchen and hall, he looked ill and unhappy. He ate little breakfast; his hand shook, his cheek was very pale, and his manner even more confused than she had previously seen it after the most lengthened debauch. She strove to draw him out of himself, and to divert his thoughts into a more agreeable channel. Instead, therefore, of reproaching him with what she took it for granted had been the tenor of his overnight's proceedings, she endeavoured to renew the subject of his trading speculations by asking him what had, after all, been the result of the examination which he had quitted her with the intention of making. A more unfortunate

chord, under existing circumstances, could not have been struck. Dick coloured to the eyes; and, scarce knowing how to meet the question, continued silent.

"I am afraid, Dick," continued the widow, "that my anticipations of that matter are more likely to be realised than yours. Jobbing is not, I suspect, so profitable a business as you fancied; and the fifty pounds would have been as well in the chest as scattered here and there and everywhere."

"Mother," replied Dick, lashing up his remorse into anger, "whatever may be the upshot of that adventure, I owe nothing to you at all events. You gave the fifty pounds, when you did give them, with such bad will, that all sense of obligation was destroyed; and now you throw in my teeth that to you I am indebted for the means of beginning business."

"Now, Dick," replied his mother, mildly, "you know that this is neither fair nor generous. I admit that I gave the money reluctantly, but there was no bad grace in the matter. And if it be lost, as I dare say it is, how can you say that I either throw, or mean to throw, the misfortune in your teeth?"

"Well, well, whatever may happen, I know this, that I only acted for the best."

"That is to say, Dick, that your speculations have failed, and that your partner has cheated you."

"How often must I repeat, mother, that I will not listen to any abuse of Tom Overy? Fail or not fail, my fortunes are of my own seeking; and as I don't intend to share the credit with any one, so neither will I allow another to bear the blame. But it 's no use sitting here to wrangle and dispute. I have other things to attend to; and I hope when I come back that I will find you in a better humour."

The poor woman put her apron to her eyes as her son rose from the table; but she made no effort to detain him. She saw, indeed, that he was very wretched; she guessed that he had just cause for wretchedness; and she would have thankfully folded him in her arms, assured him of her sympathy, and wooed him back to innocence and to peace. But even a mother cannot brook insult and scorn from a child when it passes a certain limit, and Mrs. Solley's longings were chilled and repressed by his harshness. Yet it would be doing great in-

justice to Dick were I to insinuate that he either enjoyed his mother's manifest distress, or was indifferent to it; on the contrary, there was a swelling at his heart which it required no slight exertion of self-control to keep under,—which was not kept under at last without excessive agony. But there were worse agents busy with him at the same time. Remorse,—horrid remorse, when he reflected on his last act overnight;—a vague fear, he scarce knew of what, as he looked forward to the future: these, with a sort of half-formed conviction that neither guilt nor impudence could now carry him over the difficulties that stood in his way, rendered him not merely unhappy, but desperate. He averted his eyes from his mother's condition, and flinging from the door, walked with uneasy steps towards Waltham.

The first place to which he made his way was the Black Dog. His nerves were all unstrung; and without, what in the phraseology of the tap-room is called, a hair of the dog that bit him, he knew that he would be quite unfit for business. He swallowed his noggin, and was refreshed; and now, having paid the reckoning, he was about to proceed to Tom's lodgings, when the landlord spoke.

"Have Tom and you changed places, Dick?" said Boniface.

"Changed places!" replied Dick; "what do you mean?"

"Why, I ask whether you are to be the stay-at-home this half-year and Tom the gad-about; for he started on the Telegraph two hours ago, as he said, for Romford market."

"Pooh, pooh! that's stuff!" replied Dick, while at the same time a chill for which he could not account ran through his veins. "Tom and I had an appointment this morning, for which, by the way, I am a little too late, but which will keep him at home till I join him."

"Egad! if you expect to find him down the way, you will be confoundedly deceived! I tell you he went up by the Telegraph this morning, and didn't say when he'd be back."

Dick did not delay to hear more: he hurried to Tom's lodgings, desired to see him; and learned from his landlady, not only that he was gone, but that he had taken all his clothes with him."

"And when did he say he would return?"

"He said nothing about that, you see; and, by the same token, I should not wonder if he

was off to try his luck in some other place. I fancy he 's made a nice pigeon of you, Dick Solley !"

Dick made no answer. A blow had fallen upon him so heavy, that it deprived him of all his faculties. There was in his mind the sort of calm that attends a consciousness of utter ruin ; for he neither questioned the woman, nor disputed the justice of her inference, nor made an effort even to persuade himself that his partner had been libelled. In ordinary cases, I am told that it is customary for ruined men to disbelieve at the outset the amount of the misfortune that presses them down ; they argue first the probabilities, then the possibilities, and not unfrequently the chances themselves. Thus, if a partner elopes with the money belonging to the firm, the deserted parties presume that he is merely gone for a season, and look, day after day, for his return, till they experience all the misery of hope deferred. But nothing of the sort occurred in Dick's case: he perceived, at a glance, that he was indeed the dupe of a most practised and accomplished scoundrel ; and that neither now, nor at any future period, would redress be obtained. Slow and deliberate was the pace at which Dick wended his way home-

wards. He did so, indeed, rather mechanically than designedly; for he had no plans arranged, nor was he in a condition to arrange them. Yet he reached Sheerwater in less than an hour from the period at which he had quitted it, and found his mother in some sort recovered from her distress, and busy preparing to go to church. Dick gazed upon her with a vacant stare, and passed on towards his chamber; but there was in that stare so much of meaning,—it told a tale of grief so deep-seated, of despair so profound, that in a moment his mother had cast from her her cloak and bonnet and held him in her embrace.

"Dick, you are a ruined man; I see that you are," cried she, "and you are, what is worse, a desperate man. You must not continue in that frame of mind. I am your mother. I brought you with pain and much suffering into the world; I watched over your cradle in infancy; I supported your steps in childhood; I have never been other than a mother to you since. Open out your bosom to me, my boy, for if all the world forsakes you, I cannot. Tell me what has happened,—tell me all!"

"Oh, mother!" exclaimed Dick, dropping

into a chair and covering his face with his hands; "do not kill me with these words of kindness. Reproach me, pour out abuse upon me,—tell me that I have ruined you and my little brother and sister, and cast from me the good name that used to belong to my family. Do this, and more than this,—I can bear it; but do not speak to me in the language of pity, far less of kindness."

"My poor, unhappy boy!" cried the widow, placing herself beside him, and clinging affectionately round his neck; "can you believe me capable of heaping reproach on my own son, now that misfortune has brought him back to his senses, and he is going to be all that I could have wished him to have been from the beginning? Oh, Dick! it is well to be seen that you have not lately read the Scriptures, otherwise the parable of the prodigal would have been in your mind, and you would have known that there is more joy in heaven over one sinner that repenteth, than over ninety and nine just persons that need no repentance."

Dick could not reply to this appeal, but groaned heavily; upon which his mother immediately continued.

"I see how it is: Tom Overy has deceived

you. You have been led into a business that, even in the best of times, was very precarious; and you find, on looking to your accounts, that you have lost your all. This is bad, I know; but you must bear it, my boy. Young people never think so much of experience as after they have paid a large price for it; and if these losses have the effect of weaning you from bad company, not only shall I never regret them, but I will thank God that they have happened; and as to the fifty pounds——"

"Mother, you will drive me mad!" interrupted Dick, recalled by that allusion to a full sense of the worst passage in his own career, of which a strange forgetfulness had crept over him; "if there were no more than these fifty pounds to regret the loss of, I could bear that, because I should consider that I had only got my share of the property too soon, and wasted it. But that is not the worst. Oh, no, no!"

"Then what is, my son? Tell me the worst, for I can bear it; and you will never know a moment's peace till you have completely unbosomed yourself. You have contracted debts, large debts, and have not the means of meeting them?"

"I have, indeed, mother; but bad as that is, even that is not the worst."

"God of heaven, boy!" shrieked his mother, "unless you intend me to die upon the spot, speak out at once. What have you done? Are your hands also red with blood? Am I going to lose both my sons, and to be in both utterly disgraced?"

"No, mother, no; thank God! not that," replied Dick, receiving comfort from the allusion to a crime even more heinous than that of which he had been guilty. "My hands are not red with blood; and if no other offence than murder can bring irretrievable disgrace on the family, by me at least, no, nor by Giles neither, has it been disgraced."

"Well, then," rejoined the widow, on whom the same sort of principle operated as had just had a tendency to soothe her son's agitation—"do not hesitate to speak out. So long as you have not committed murder, and by doing so put your own life in jeopardy, you cannot tell me anything which I shall not be able to hear with patience."

Dick made an effort, cleared his throat, raised himself on his seat, but almost immediately fell back again.

"It won't do, mother; I cannot make a clean breast at this moment. By-and-by you shall hear all; and then I know what you will think of me. In the mean time I have only to say that I am indeed entirely ruined. There are liabilities out against that cursed partnership for more than a hundred and twenty pounds; and the rascal into whose hands I put myself is off this morning, nobody knows where, by the Telegraph. Oh, that I had taken your advice when you first gave it! I should not now be sitting in this miserable plight, nor you trying to cheer where you have the best right to condemn."

"This is indeed a bad business, Dick," said his mother; "but I own to you, it is not much worse than I expected. I was sure that Tom Overy would make a tool of you. Upwards of a hundred and twenty pounds!—that is a great amount, Dick; but we must not permit the good name of the Solleys to be disgraced. God knows whether I have a right to do so; yet I think your father would have done it had he been alive, and I am sure Giles, if he were here, would give his sanction to it. A hundred and twenty pounds! Well, well, no matter; we must not disgrace ourselves."

The widow rose as she said this, and walked up stairs towards her chamber; while Dick, though fearfully conscious of the purport of her journey, had neither the courage nor the strength to detain her. He sat, on the contrary, like one bereaved of muscular power, in the arm-chair, listening to her footstep on the wooden staircase, as the condemned criminal may listen to the gaoler's tread on the morning fixed for his execution. And now the latch of the chamber-door was raised; and now her shoes creaked along the floor overhead; and now he heard the key applied to the lock of the chest, and the lid thrown up with a bang, which caused it to strike against the wall. A pause then ensued, during which the only sound that smote upon Dick's organs of hearing was the beating of his own heart. But that ended at last; and then there was uttered a scream, so shrill, so wild, so harrowing, that spell-bound as he had hitherto been, Dick awoke as from a trance. He ran up stairs; he rushed into the chamber, and reached his mother just in time to catch her as she sank towards the floor.

"You know the worst now, mother," exclaimed he in a hoarse, choking, and desperate voice. "The pocket-book is gone, and all its contents. It was I that took it. I, your own

son, robbed you no later than last night, and gave all to that miscreant who has gone off with it. Now then, mother,—now what say you?"

"What I would have said," replied the widow, recovering her composure in the most surprising manner, "had you spared me this shock by speaking out, when I implored you to do so, down stairs. Even this is scarcely more than I expected from such a connexion. I did not, indeed, think that your own mother would have been the victim; but I should tell an untruth if I denied that from day to day I have expected to hear of some robbery, or theft, or fraud, which would send you both to Maidstone, if it did not bring you to the gallows!"

"I thought it would be so," replied Dick, his manner acquiring somewhat of the rigidity which used to adhere to it previous to the discovery of his partner's treason: "I had no right to expect that you would act otherwise by me; and I am quite ready to give myself up, were it only that I might have the satisfaction of implicating that scoundrel in my crime and in its punishment."

"Dick," was his mother's answer, "you cannot for a moment suppose that *I* am going to proceed against *you*, even for this; no, not if I were sure of getting you off, while we hanged

your accomplice, would I so far debase myself. Neither is it for you to speak of vengeance on a man whose character was no secret to you before you became connected with him, and to whose acquaintance you would adhere in spite of all my remonstrances. No, my son; I must now make use of your own expression, and say, 'what is done, cannot be undone.' The little property that belonged to me, and to your brothers and your sister, is gone; nor would any proceedings against your betrayer enable us to get it back again. Besides, your good name is still of some value; and even now, if the memory of this black deed keep you what you ought to be in future, it may be a blessing in God's hands. But you must bear with me if I find it difficult all at once to overcome my feelings. I will do so as soon as I can; for the present I am not myself. Go, and leave me here! I will open my mind to God in prayer, and he will give me strength."

Dick left his mother, as he was desired to do, and returned to the kitchen. How he spent the next half-hour it is scarcely necessary to state: as for his mother, with her it was a period of deep, fervent, sincere, and therefore hallowed devotion.

CHAPTER XII.

BAD TIMES.

For some time previous to the occurrence of the events recorded in the preceding chapter, there had prevailed in and around Waltham suspicions touching the solvency of the jobbing partnership, of which Dick was not aware. It appeared that the bankers, though they had not actually refused any check, were of late slow, and, as it seemed, shy of paying; persons from whom stock had been got on credit were scarcely satisfied, because shorter accounts were not kept; and the landlord, from whom the meadows were hired, had given warning that he expected to be paid half-yearly. Of this seeming distrust of his and his partner's integrity, Dick was profoundly ignorant, because, as I stated some time ago, it belonged to his department to look after the more distant traffic, while Tom managed entirely the domestic concerns.

No sooner did the report spread abroad, however, that Tom was gone, than creditors of all descriptions made their appearance. Sheerwater was beset from morning to night. One brought a promissory note which had been due a week, and demanded payment; a second was sure that Mr. Richard Solley would not fail to give cash for the pig which he had got from a poor widow three weeks ago; a third clamoured for the odds which had been promised in swapping a four-year old colt for a brood-mare; and a fourth did not care a button, but if he were not paid for his sheep he would see what the law could do, and maybe Dick should go to prison. Among others who arrived in the course of Monday morning was Mr. Sankey. He had entrusted Dick with five capital bullocks, each worth fifteen pounds if it was worth a farthing; and though they were all sold, and sold well too, he had never fingered a farthing of the money. Dick, as may be imagined, was not at home when any of these visitors called: and the rest, after giving vent to certain oaths and opprobrious epithets, withdrew; but Mr. Sankey sat down in the kitchen, and began to discuss the question with Dick's mother.

"I am not going to be put off at this rate, Mrs. Solley," said he; "I think I have done pretty well for your family, without submitting patiently to be diddled out of my money by any member of it; and therefore, if the cost of these beasts be not paid, amounting at the lowest calculation to seventy-five pounds, you may depend upon it that I will proceed against your son as a swindler."

"Would to God that I had the means of paying, Mr. Sankey!" replied the widow; "you should not have to ask twice for your money."

"As to that," was the rejoinder, "we all know that you *have* the means; and though I can't say that the whole sum belongs to Dick, still, as he will by-and-by be entitled to his share, I think it would be no more than common honesty if you were to give it up now—at least in part payment."

"The share of what?" asked the widow.

"Of the two hundred pounds, to be sure, which you once talked of committing to my care; but which, thank God, as things have turned out, I never fingered. Dick's share of that comes, I take it, to fifty; and if I had that much, I could wait for the remaining twenty-five."

"Then you don't know the full amount of our misfortunes, Mr. Sankey?" replied the widow. "In an evil hour, I let him have the use of those two hundred pounds, and the whole is gone, and we are literally beggars."

At this intelligence Mr. Sankey lost all patience. He rose from his seat; stamped with his foot upon the ground; swore that he would have revenge, let the expense be what it might; and warned Mrs. Solley that she should not remain in his house beyond next Thursday, which was Michaelmas-day. It was to no purpose that the widow endeavoured to soothe and to conciliate; the more she spoke in mitigation of his anger, the more fiercely the flame burned; till, finding that neither arguments nor tears availed, she held her tongue. Unfortunately for her, half a year's rent was due, that is to say, the half-year's nominal rent which, on entering, had been settled between them, with the distinct understanding, however, that it should be worked out at the dairy, where her attendance had been both regular and highly beneficial. But as there was no written agreement on this head, Mr. Sankey did not scruple, in his wrath, to act as if no agreement existed. On Michaelmas-day an execution was accordingly put

into the house; and all the furniture was seized and carried off. A warrant at the same time having been taken out against Dick, he was arrested; and while the son was hurried off to gaol, the mother was turned into the street. It appeared, however, on the arrival of the sheriff's officer and his prisoner at Maidstone, that the latter was under age, and of course not liable for any debts contracted in the course of business. He returned, therefore, the same night to Waltham, wearied, famishing, and penniless, where he found that his mother, with his little sister and brother, were inmates of the workhouse, and himself destitute of a place of shelter under which to hide his head.

Had all this happened one year sooner, terrible as was the shock, some head might have been made against it. Agricultural labourers were then scarce; and in spite of his moral delinquencies, and of the odium into which they brought him, Dick Solley could still have found employment. Now, however, the case was very different. Multitudes of disbanded soldiers and sailors had been sent back to their parishes; there was no longer a competition among the farmers to find men, but a competition among the men to find masters; while the

daily diminishing price of corn and other agricultural produce rendered the farmer desirous of cultivating his lands at as moderate a cost as was at all compatible with his views of propriety. The consequence was, that, being unwilling to reduce the amount of wages to individuals, the tenantry began to strike off a certain number of hands from their employ; and thus numbers of young, healthy, and willing persons no longer knew where to apply for a day's work. It would have been strange indeed if, under such circumstances, a young man who had disgraced himself like Dick Solley could have found a master. Nobody would countenance him, nobody would give him a job. For many nights he slept under a cow-shed, getting his scanty meals by the sale, first of his watch, then of his breast-pin, and finally of his gaberdine and hat. At last, however, even these resources failed him; and along with several others similarly circumstanced he made his appearance in the committee-room on Thursday to crave — oh, bitter, bitter degradation to one of his name! parochial relief.

There was something so novel in this state of things, that the farmers could neither understand nor manage it. They would not listen to

the applications of the young and the healthy, but refused them peremptorily both relief and employment. For a while the lusty paupers bore with the repulse; but the demands of hunger were pressing: they ascertained that an appeal lay from the parish vestry to the bench of magistrates, and to the magistrates their complaints were carried.

A great deal has been said of the shameful prodigality with which these rural magnates disposed of the property of their neighbours. I have no intention of becoming their champion; for I believe that they were at the beginning of the peace, and for many years after, by far too apt to listen to the pauper's tale. But let it be remembered, in mitigation of this error, that the rural aristocracy had never beheld among their tenants the faintest symptom of straitened means; and that at the very moment when he was refusing either to relieve or employ some applicant for food, the parish overseer was drinking his port wine and driving his wife to church in his chaise. Neither did there seem to be any moderation in the farmer's views. He drove the petitioner from him as if he had been an animal of an inferior order; and bade him steal, starve, or hang

himself, for he should have no relief from the parish. Now, an English gentleman may commit mistakes, but he is almost always generous and high-minded. He could not endure to see the peasant thus browbeaten; and thinking, if he said it not, that the oppressor was little if at all superior to the oppressed, he stood between the latter and his imaginary wrongs with more of chivalry than of strict justice. Had he lowered his own rents at the time that he was making out orders for relief upon the parish officers round him, nobody could have blamed him for such orders. In that case the expense would have come ultimately, if not directly, out of his own pocket. But this he forgot to do; and the consequence was, an excessive and sudden pressure upon the tenantry, which, coming on the back of reduced prices, ground them to the dust. Then came applications without end for a reduction of rents; then were heard, for the first time, complaints of the oppressive nature of tithes: corn-laws were clamoured for and obtained, and agricultural distress became a standing topic of conversation in all companies. But it did so happen that in the midst of all his complaints and petitions, the farmer continued

to live as he had done during the war, till he found himself, before the expiration of his lease, in many instances unable to live at all.

Time passed, and each new year as it came in saw things getting worse and worse both with the occupier and the peasant. The landlord found when current leases had expired, that, though there was still an unaccountable competition for land, he acted with the greatest prudence who let his farms at a moderate rent. In this case he might calculate on being paid something; whereas he whose rent-roll exhibited an enormous amount of figures, generally discovered, when the time of settlement came, that he had little else to show as the return from his broad acres. Meanwhile the country banks, at all times conducted with extraordinary liberality, did their best to sustain the sinking credit of the agriculturists. The issues of provincial notes increased everywhere to a prodigious extent. The tenant who was hard pressed to-day for rent, for tithes, for poor-rates, for taxes, or for any other of those demands to which his agreeable style of living rendered him liable, had only to go to the banking-house, sign his name to a bill, grant a sort of mortgage on his crops, or stock, or

implements of trade, and he received an advance to almost any amount. To be sure, such advances were always made in the notes of the house which granted the accommodation; but as landlord, parson, tax-gatherer, wine-merchant, and in short all the members of the community to whom payments were due, received these notes without scruple, they were just as useful to the needy tenant as if they had been so many guineas. Thus, while there was actual bankruptcy in every quarter, a sort of artificial credit was kept up; and business went on, no one knew how, though all at the year's end pronounced themselves losers.

The state of the labourer during this interval, though certainly not what it had been eight or ten years previously, was far from pitiable. Many more were employed on the land than the land actually required,—at least so said the occupier; though there were lookers-on who very much doubted the fact. They were not, indeed, kept constantly at work under one master, as had been the case formerly; neither did they receive all their wages from the gentleman whose fields they tilled. But their wages were still good, varying from two shillings and three-pence to half-a-crown a day;

and though half of this was paid out of the poor-rates, what was that to them? It might, perhaps, teach them to consider parochial relief as no badge of infamy: it did render them indifferent as to whether their employers were satisfied or not, because they were quite sure, in the event of a quarrel with one, to find another ready to receive them; seeing that the parish must keep them, and it was better to keep them busy than idle. But it had not the effect of lessening the amount to be received at the end of each week, and left them more leisure than they used to enjoy for indulgence in the alehouse. While, therefore, there was a universal cry of bad times and poverty, the voices of singing men and singing women were as loud as ever in the tap-rooms; and the labourer over his beer followed the example of the tenant over his port, by attributing all the evils to which he was subject to the mismanagement of his rulers.

In England, as well as in all others of what are called free countries — I might, perhaps, have said with equal truth, in all countries whether popularly governed or otherwise — the surest source of disaffection and hostility to the laws is distress. Let men's affairs go wrong,

and, no matter what may be the cause, the effect is everywhere the same. This was evinced, at a very early period after the close of the war, in the manufacturing districts, which were not kept under except by the most vigorous measures. And now the infection seemed to have spread, as it was very apt to do, into the agricultural counties. It was not to be supposed that in this respect Waltham could be behind other parishes in the county. Here, as well as elsewhere, there had been Whigs and Tories time out of mind; and though during the prosperous season of war party differences were little felt among them, now that evil days had succeeded, political animosities began to revive, in which the labourers and petty tradesmen, but especially the latter, were encouraged to take part. The process was this:

The liberal tenants of the liberal landlord were exceedingly glad to see the people take an interest in national affairs, and gave every countenance to the formation of societies in which all manner of topics might be discussed. Thus encouraged, the people were not slow in acquiring a taste for political speculation. The Black Dog took in, for the benefit of its customers,

not only a provincial but a London newspaper of the most approved kind. These were read aloud by certain individuals for the benefit of the company which frequented the tap-room, and the reader was remunerated, at the close of his exercise, by having the expense of his potations included in the common bill. Of course the prints thus eagerly devoured held up to unmitigated abhorrence all established usages, and all men in office. One tone, indeed, pervaded them from beginning to end, of which it would be to speak too mildly, if I were to say that it was treasonous in the extreme; for it was worse than this. The poor were sedulously instructed to believe that the rich had with them no sympathy; kings, nobles, legislators, magistrates, gentlemen, and, more than all, the clergy, were represented as vultures that preyed upon the people's vitals; and a thousand tales, fabricated for the purpose, were told in corroboration of the statements. And to their shame be it spoken, there were those even among the yeomen, who, perceiving that no direct charge was brought against their own class, encouraged for party purposes the deluded poor to study such lessons, because they hoped to wring that diminution of rent

from their landlords' fears, which they had failed to obtain from their compassion. I need not add, that under the working of such a system, the moral and religious feelings of Waltham rapidly declined. But as I shall not be required, at least for the present, to describe the issue of the experiment, I here close my digression, not without a secret consciousness that it has already swelled to a length which the nature of my history scarcely warrants.

CHAPTER XIII.

LODGINGS TO LET.

It is not to be imagined that the friends of order, of religion, and of morals, were either blind to these mischievous proceedings, or backward in applying to the malady such remedies as their best judgment could suggest. The increasing depravity of the lower orders being attributed to ignorance, the most praiseworthy exertions were made to remove it. National schools sprang up in every parish. The children of the poor were not only received into these seminaries on application;—educated free of all expense to their parents, and loaded with gifts in the shape of prizes; but the clergyman, the clergyman's wife, the squire, the Lady Bountiful, with I know not how many other benevolent persons besides, went about from cottage to cottage, imploring the poor to send their children to school. As such applications

were generally accompanied by some small but acceptable present, they were for the most part attended to; and crowds of urchins came to learn their letters, sometimes at the hour appointed, sometimes an hour too late, sometimes regularly, sometimes the reverse. But if in these respects they exhibited little heed either to the wishes of their patrons or to their own improvement, in other matters their attention to appearances was very conspicuous. They came, be it late or early,—I mean the girls,—with their hair in papers, and ear-rings in their ears, doubtless as a sort of set-off to the ragged frocks and soiled pinafores in which they were arrayed. Nor could the patrons of the school, in spite of repeated orders to the contrary, overcome this laudable disposition to shine; because the tenure on which they held their pupils together was a singular one. It was no favour done either to parent or child, the admission of the latter into the national school; on the contrary, the answer of the cottager, when petitioned to get her little ones instructed, was in almost all instances the same: "To be sure, ma'am, learning is a fine thing, and I should like to see my Kitty a scholard; only you see I wants her to keep the bab when I

goes out to work. But I have no objection to oblige you, and I will send her to school next Monday."

So to school Kitty came, firmly convinced that the gentlefolks had some purpose of their own to serve in bringing her there; and having learned to repeat by rote what others repeated before her, and scratched for a while on a slate the likeness of nothing "that is in heaven above, or in the earth beneath, or in the waters under the earth," she fancied that she had done great things, made all the parish her debtors, and rendered herself fit to be the wife of young Mr. Sankey himself.

The first effect of the national school-system at Waltham was to put an extinguisher on the academies of three or four worthy old dames, who, for the last twenty or thirty years, (and they were but the successors of their mothers and grandmothers,) had there enjoyed a monopoly of tuition. Rapidly they broke up; and after mourning over the change of days, and condemning all innovations, they betook themselves, in order to avoid starvation, to the workhouse. One indeed, old Dame Hornbook, clung with commendable pertinacity to her office. Though her pupils fell off from thirty to seven, she still

wielded the rod; while, in order to eke out the little income arising from their sixpences, she took to manufacturing lollipops and ginger-bread men, which she placed in her window. But Dame Hornbook's was, as might be imagined, a severe struggle to keep the wolf from the door; nor would she have succeeded at last but for an occurrence as unlooked-for as it proved in its consequences to be momentous.

Among other shifts to which she had recourse, in order to keep soul and body together, Dame Hornbook made arrangements for taking in a lodger; and as she was remarkably clean and neat in her habits, she had no lack of applications for her apartment. The dame, however, being one who loved regular hours, would neither entrust the key of the door to her inmate, nor undertake to open it after it had once been locked; and as the generality of the young men in Waltham went upon a totally different principle, though almost all made trial of her as a landlady, no one would continue with her beyond a fortnight at the furthest. The consequence was, that tidy as her apartment was, it might have continued empty, and she herself been driven to fol-

low the example of her sister governesses, had not she received one morning an application from the landlord of the Red Lion in favour of a stranger who had come from London over-night by the coach.

"What does he look like?" demanded the dame.

"He's a gentleman," replied mine host; and has plenty of money about him, that's certain. He wears a gold watch in his fob, and is well dressed; but beyond that I know nothing, only that he is very quiet, drinks little, gives nobody no trouble, and pays his bill without making any inquiries."

"But does anybody know him? These be kittle times to take in strangers. He may be that vile fellow, Orator Hunt, for aught I know."

"Faith, dame," was the answer, "I don't think either you or I ought to be quite so particular. I thought I had done you a kindness when I recommended him to your apartment; but since you seem to think otherwise, I dare say we will be able to find a being for him elsewhere."

"Stop a bit, stop a bit; not quite so fast, friend. Send your gentleman here, and if I

fancy him and he fancies me, he shall have the chamber, and I 'll undertake to do for him."

The landlord withdrew, but returned in a few minutes, bringing the stranger along with him. The latter, though a young man, — perhaps under thirty, — was deeply bronzed, as if he had dwelt long in a tropical climate. His hair was black and glossy; he wore a pair of black moustaches; there was a considerable beard under the chin; yet the expression of his countenance was good, and, when he smiled, peculiarly attractive. In height he was about the middle size, well made, spare and muscular; his mien was that of a sea-faring person, and his dress the ordinary costume of the day; so that from it nothing indicative of his position in life could be gathered. Dame Hornbook pulled down her spectacles from her brow, and settling them over her eyes, examined every line in his face with great attention; and having, as it seemed, received a favourable impression, desired to be informed of his will. It was soon explained. He had some reasons of his own for wishing to reside in Waltham a short while, and particularly disliked the bustle of a public-house; and therefore, if she would consent to take him in, he would be glad to

become her lodger. The landlord of the Lion, perceiving that the negotiation was likely to end satisfactorily, retired. The dame and her new acquaintance, who gave his name Mr. Tomkins, soon came to terms; and his portmanteau being removed across the way, he took possession forthwith of his apartment.

It was early in the day when Mr. Tomkins settled himself at Dame Hornbook's; and as he had nothing else to do, and professed to be a great admirer of scenery, he set out, as he himself informed his landlady, to look about him. Of course, he soon became an object of marked curiosity to the villagers: for though one of the great roads to London ran through the place, and they were accustomed to all sorts of costumes and outlandish faces, to have a dark man with black moustaches, wholly unconnected with the neighbourhood, take up his abode among them, was a phenomenon to which they were *not* accustomed. The women stared at him as he drew towards them, and turned round to stare again after he had passed. The children followed his steps, though at a respectful distance; and the men, uncertain whether to salute him or not, made a sort of half-motion with the right hand that signified nothing. It

was manifest, however, first, that he was a total stranger to the *locale*, and next, that he was remarkably civil; for he stopped more than one individual that he might inquire the names of the houses and hamlets that lay round the village; and having persuaded the sexton to carry him to the top of the church-tower, gave him a shilling to drink, as the reward of his good-nature. Still the question ran, who could he be? Was he a government spy? for such things were then supposed to be abroad; or was he one of Orator Hunt's agents, and come to stir up the people of Kent to rebellion? Long and eagerly were these questions discussed that night by the village politicians both in the Black Dog and the Blue Bear, insomuch that the Kent Mercury itself, though more than usually crammed with anecdotes of griping parsons, barbarous landlords, and the tyrant Castlereagh, scarcely commanded one willing auditor.

While the good people of Waltham were thus wearying themselves to discover whence Mr. Tomkins could have come, and what his business might be, Mr. Tomkins himself was seated by the side of Dame Hornbook's fire, deeply engaged with her in earnest conver-

sation. He had warned her that he should not return home till evening; and as it was the beginning of December, and he kept his word faithfully, by five o'clock he and she were *tête-à-tête*. Nor were they without comforts very much to the taste of the old woman. Mr. Tomkins had sent in from the shop tea, sugar, butter, bread, candles, and other matters such as he might be expected to require; and he now, very greatly to the surprise and delight of his aged landlady, committed all to her keeping, and requested her to prepare one meal such as might suffice for both. I said some time ago, that the result of Dame Hornbook's first examination of her lodger's countenance was to impress her with a favourable opinion of him; and I need not add, that this marked predilection for her society, accompanied as it was with the gift of an excellent cup of tea, won her heart altogether.

The tea being made, the fire poked up, and a mould-candle (a rare sight to Dame Hornbook's eyes) casting a cheerful light through the room, the stranger, after putting up the window-shutter, and thrusting the bolt into the staple of the door, took possession of an armchair in the corner of the wide chimney, and

fell, as it appeared, into a fit of abstraction. Dame Hornbook's heart, however, being merry, she did not understand how any person could be silent, yet cheerful; so, after filling Mr. Tomkins's cup, she addressed to him one or two questions, such as she believed likely to draw him out. "What did he think of the county?" "Had he ever seen Waltham before?" "Was not the church very fine," and "the monuments in the chancel beautiful." "There was one in particular which she was sure must have attracted his attention. It was to the memory of Sir John de Norfleet, his wife, and sixteen children; all of whom were sculptured in marble, in kneeling positions; the knight, on one side of a cushion, with his eight sons behind him, diminishing in size as they fell off from their father; and the lady opposite, with her eight daughters in similar array as a sort of train." To such questions Mr. Tomkins replied with great readiness and good-humour; and then, to the amazement of the dame, became himself the querist.

"You have asked me, mother, whether I was ever in Waltham before: now I will tell you, though I don't wish other people to know it, that I was; and I am anxious to know the

fate of certain persons that were living here when I last visited the place. You probably know Mr. Sankey: is he still alive, and what is he doing?"

"Oh, to be sure he is," answered the dame —"he is alive, and still, as he used to be, steward to my lord; but times are not so well with him, nor indeed with any of them, as they once were; and no wonder. When they began to take the bread out of poor people's mouths by their national schools, as they call them, they couldn't expect a blessing to go with their labours."

"Then there was Mr. Rigden, what has become of him?"

"He is still at Gorse Hall, and, like his neighbours, complaining."

"And the Solleys of Crackstakes?"

"Oh, Lord pity them, poor creatures! they are all broke and gone. Their misfortunes began with the death of old Muster Solley, as good a man, and as much respected, as any in the county of Kent. They might have got over that, mayhap, which was only in the course of nature, if the boys had conducted themselves properly; but never did two young men so disappoint the expectations of all that knew

them. The youngest, him they call Dick, or Richard, is still here, one of the most determined profligates in the parish; for he linked himself with that reprobate Tom Overy, almost as soon as Giles disappeared; and the two never rested till they had run through all that old Muster Solley left, and sent Mrs. Solley and her younger children into the workhouse. But you are poorly, sir; what is the matter?"

Mr. Tomkins *was* poorly. He was liable to sudden stitches, and one of them had attacked him then; but he would soon be better. He would drink his warm tea, and that would relieve him. He did so, and his composure returned.

"Was Crackstakes taken from them then?"

"Oh, yes, to be sure it was. How that came about I can't tell; there are many different stories told: but the Solleys moved to Sheerwater soon after the Michaelmas term, and Muster Rigden tacked on their farm to his own. There were many that cried shame on my lord and his steward for dismissing tenants that had so long held under him."

"You said that Giles Solley disappeared.

How did that happen, and what was the cause of it?"

"You are a stranger to me, sir," replied the dame, "and I don't know how far I may speak openly before you; but as I only say what I have been told, it's no concern of mine who hears it. They said that he ran away to escape justice after he had murdered Mary Tapsal."

"What!" exclaimed the stranger, starting up, "Mary Tapsal murdered! In the name of God when did that occur, and where?"

"So you knew Mary Tapsal also, did you? Well! you must be better acquainted with Waltham than you would have even me believe. But, since you know so much already, there can be no harm done if you know more. Mary Tapsal was murdered on the night of Friday the ninth day of March 1813. Her body was found next day among the osiers at the bottom of the meadow, with the throat cut from ear to ear; and as Giles Solley was known to keep company with her, and was seen coming out of the churchyard that very night with his gaberdine covered with blood; as he went off, also, before morning, leaving his bloody clothes behind, and has never been heard of since, it is

no wonder if people in general suppose that he destroyed her. But, for my part, I knew Giles Solley well. I taught him to read and write when he was a little boy, and a sweeter child, and more kind-hearted and upright youth, never walked upon shoe-leather ; therefore, if all the world were to swear that he murdered Mary Tapsal I would not believe them, and when the day of judgment comes, we shall see who was right and who was wrong."

The stranger did not interrupt his landlady during this long oration, though it might have been easy to gather, from the working of his countenance, that he paid little attention to it. At its close he made no direct reply, but gave utterance to several incoherent exclamations.

" Great God ! then he murdered her after all ! In the month of March 1813 ! Why, it was the very night ; and it was to kill her that he led her down into the meadow, after he found it impossible to work upon her for other purposes."

" Who killed her, and who led her into the meadow ?"

" Who !" cried Mr. Tomkins, manifestly unconscious either that a question had been put

or that he was answering; "who but that most accursed of all scoundrels, Tom Overy?"

"You are no stranger here," shrieked the old woman, springing from her stool as if she had been suddenly restored to youth, and grasping Mr. Tomkins by the arm—"Who are you? speak! Who are you that confirms the suspicion that for years and years I have kept in my breast, though I did not dare to breathe it to any one?"

"Mother," replied the stranger solemnly, "can I trust you? I know that I can. I am not a stranger here. There is not an object in or about the place which is not familiar to me. Your own face, your own room, your own voice, all carry me back to the day of my infancy. Mother, I am Giles Solley."

CHAPTER XIV.

"Here awa', there awa', ha'ud awa' hame!"

I need not detail either the astonishment of Dame Hornbook, or the particulars of the conversation which ensued on this disclosure. Enough is done when I state, that Giles described at length the scene to which he had been witness in the churchyard; his own horror, the bursting of the blood-vessel in his nose, his hasty flight home, and the agony which he endured when alone in his chamber. "Never till that hour, mother," continued he, "was I aware how deeply I loved her. And to find that my devotion was misplaced; that she was not only heartless but depraved; to be made aware thus suddenly of the nature of the precipice on the very brink of which I had stood — mother, my brain would not stand it: I threw off my bloody gaberdine, put on a jacket, let myself quietly out of the front door,

and ran, I knew not whither. The dawn of day found me on the beach, with a man-of-war's boat hauled on shore; and the crew, watching, as I afterwards learned, for smugglers, sitting round it. I was mad. I did not know what I was about. I offered to accompany them on board of ship; and before self-possession returned, I was on my way to the coast of Africa.

"Repenting, when it was too late, of the precipitation with which I had acted, I endeavoured to make my case known to the captain; but I received for answer, that the king was in want of seamen, and that I ought to have thought of all that before I volunteered. My next most anxious wish was to find an opportunity of communicating with my friends at home, whose anxiety on my account would be, I did not doubt, extreme. I little thought that in flying from my own misery I had involved them and myself in irretrievable disgrace. Well, no vessel of any kind bound for England met us in all our passage, and we reached the African coast without any misfortune; but there a terrible storm overtook us, and the ship being cast away upon a rocky shore, every soul, for aught I know to the con-

trary, perished, except myself. I was carried to the land upon a hencoop to which I clung, and cast up, more dead than alive, over a frightful precipice, where one of the natives found me in a state of complete exhaustion, and with great humanity removed me to his house. The man was a Mohammedan, and an officer of rank in the service of the prince; and ascertaining that I was an Englishman, behaved very kindly to me. In fact, he introduced me to the sovereign; and as all Englishmen were supposed at that court to be skilful both in medicine and the art of war, I found myself called upon, first, to prescribe for the favourite wife of the king, and then to undertake the training of a corps of infantry.

"If I had been removed all at once from Crackstakes to Babooland, you may well believe that I should have made a sorry figure either as a doctor or a general. As it was, the notice which I had taken of the drilling of the marines sufficed to give me some confidence in drilling the negroes; while, as good luck would have it, I had been frequently employed in the cock-pit, and therefore could venture to bleed, and to administer a dose of common physic. The belief in my skill was, happily for me,

confirmed by the recovery of the black queen; and my valour and conduct as an officer soon became conspicuous. The Baboos were at war with a neighbouring tribe, the Shushoos, from whom they had sustained repeated defeats. But some muskets having been saved out of the wreck of our vessel, and the palace of King Cooboo containing a cask of damaged powder, I armed a few men as Europeans are armed, and having accustomed them to the report of their own weapons, led them forth to fight, in perfect confidence of victory. Nor was I disappointed. At the first discharge, though not more than seven of the nineteen muskets went off, the whole army of Shushoos took to flight; and we were enabled soon afterwards to dictate a peace in the enemy's capital.

"It would little interest you, good mother, if I were to describe the sort of life which I led among these savage people during four tedious years. Kind to me they were, as kind as men could be; for the king offered me the choice of all his wives."

"And I hope you did not take her," interrupted Dame Hornbook.

"No, no, mother, nothing of the sort. I was too anxious to return home, too uneasy

about my mother and her little ones, to think of forming a connexion elsewhere. But I did accept the gold and jewels with which he loaded me; and watched eagerly for an opportunity of withdrawing myself from his country. But there was little traffic between Baboo and any European settlement; so that month after month, and year after year, stole on, and still I was miserable. At last, however, an American cruiser came into the river to water, with which, in spite of the jealousy of the Baboos, I contrived to open a communication. The result was, that though obliged to sacrifice the larger portion of my riches, I was enabled to convey on board enough to set me up in business, and keep me with frugality and industry the rest of my days; and that, taking my passage in the officers' cabin, I arrived safely in London ten days ago. And in what state do I find my family and my own reputation!"

Having thus described his past adventures, Giles proceeded to consult with his landlady how it would be advisable to proceed, in order not merely to vindicate his own good name from reproach, but to bring the real murderer to justice. With this view, he questioned her closely as to all that had come out on the in-

quest; and being more and more satisfied that, provided one or two links could be taken up, the proof of Overy's guilt would be perfect, he set himself anxiously to search for them.

"What had become of the woman who lived as housemaid in Mr. Jacobson's family at the period when Mary Tapsal was murdered?"

"She was married and settled in a neighbouring parish, and was the mother of two children."

"Was the cobbler still alive whose hammer had been used on that awful occasion?"

"He was, and continued to work where he used to do; nay, and still more, he kept the hammer hung up in his shop in the very same state it was in when the coroner handled it, either because he expected some day or another to produce it in a court of justice, or because he loved to entertain his customers and visitors with the tradition attaching to it."

Giles put his hand before his eyes, and thought deeply some time. "There was a boy that used to work at Farrier's forge, by name Jem Spark; he was an apprentice to Farrier, and a particularly intelligent lad ——?"

"He is still in the forge. He is now Farrier's journeyman and right-hand man."

"And Overy himself, — has any trace been had of him?"

Dame Hornbook was not so sure of that. He had never been in Waltham, certainly since the breaking up of his partnership with Dick; but whether anybody knew aught about him, was more than she could tell.

Giles had nothing more to ask; and interesting as the conversation was, the good dame was beginning to exhibit symptoms of weariness: he therefore bound her, under a solemn promise, not to reveal to a human being the secret with which he had entrusted her; and having satisfied himself that his mother, though an inmate of the workhouse, was still in health, he retired to his chamber. It was not to be expected that he should sleep very soundly.

Giles Solley was an early riser; and the necessity under which he had been thrown of depending throughout some years of his life on his own resources, had given him a wonderful command both of his feelings and his manner. When he met Dame Hornbook next morning, therefore, there were no traces in his countenance of anxiety or excitement; indeed the dame almost doubted whether she had not dreamed of Giles Solley's return, and was now awakened to a

knowledge of real events by finding that a stranger was her lodger. Just before he went out, however, Giles saluted her so affectionately that the visions of the previous night came back in full force; and she wished him God-speed, whatever his business might be, with the fervour of one who prayed from the heart: nor was the prayer uttered in vain.

There were two objects before Giles Solley, both of which he was desirous to accomplish with as little delay as possible, though one of them could not be entered upon till the other should have been in some sort effected. He desired, in his assumed name, to make affidavit before a magistrate, accusing Tom Overy of the crime of murder; and then to hunt through every lane and alley in London, whither he understood that the ruffian was gone, till he should find him. To-day he calculated that the magistrate might be seen, and his warrant obtained; and on the morrow he would proceed by the first coach to town. He made, therefore, for the Lion, where a place might be secured; and entered with the host into a conversation out of which he hoped to collect who was, or at least who was considered to be, the most intelligent justice in the neighbourhood. Publicans are

generally excellent judges of the qualifications of the magistrates round them. So Giles was quite satisfied when assured, "that Colonel Hamilton, him as had lately taken Birch Grove, was by far the ablest justice on the bench; because, as how, he did not bother his head about trifles, though no man could be more in earnest when a serious case came before him." To him Giles resolved to apply; and he was passing the tap-room door for that purpose, when a voice, of which the tones were familiar to him, struck upon his ear.

"Well, well," the speaker said, "our turn will come next. They may hang the poor fellows if they please; but take my word for it, mates, that this sort of thing won't last for ever. There are more nor one Thistlewood in the world, and the bloody Castlereagh will some day know it."

Giles looked in; and there, in the corner of a box, with his face full towards him, sat Tom Overy. He was a good deal changed since Giles last saw him; for time, and, far more, dissipation, had scored and bloated his countenance; and, besides that his dress was mean and squalid, he looked worn down with long travel. Three or four of his old acquaintances,

who had dropped in for their morning's draught, stood round him, and he seemed to be dilating to them on some great event which had just befallen. Giles did not stop to ascertain what that event might be; but perceiving that a small bundle and a stick lay on the table before Overy, he addressed himself in a whisper to the landlord.

"Do you know that man in the corner of the box yonder?"

The landlord looked in. "To be sure I do," said he; "that 's Tom Overy, a d—nation wild chap he used to be when he lived here; but we haven't seen anything of him these four years. And I 'm blowed if he don't look seedy."

"Mark!" again whispered Giles, "as you shall answer for it in a court of justice, don't allow that man to go till you hear from me again. That man has a great account to settle; and if you permit him to escape, your life will go for his."

The landlord stared, bowed, and expressed his willingness to do anything that was proper; but what right had he to detain a traveller if he chose to go?

"I will bear you blameless," answered Giles: "and now, which is the nearest way to Colonel Hamilton's?"

"Go to the end of the street, sir, across the bridge, and then take the path to your left. But here, as good luck would have it, comes the colonel himself; that's him upon horseback."

Giles advanced to meet the gentleman, and, raising his hat, received a polite salutation in return. "May I crave a few words with you, sir, on public business of the greatest importance? And may I, moreover, entreat the favour of you to detain a man who is now sitting in the tap-room of the Lion, and whom I am prepared to convict of a heinous capital offence?"

"What!" exclaimed the colonel, "one of the Cato-street gang? Has the rascal made his way this length already? Come and show me your man."

They moved towards the Lion, but were yet a few paces from it, when Overy appeared at the door in angry colloquy with the host.

"That is he, sir," cried Giles; "make him your prisoner."

The colonel rode up, and desired Overy, in the king's name, to surrender.

"What am I to surrender for?" exclaimed Tom, thrusting his hand into his bosom; "show me your authority to detain a traveller on his journey, or I won't submit to you or to any man."

The colonel sprang from his horse, and Giles rushed forward; for Overy had already cast himself loose from the landlord, and made as if he would take his chance of escape by flight. Giles was the first to close with him; on which he pulled a pistol from beneath his waistcoat and presented it: but before he could pull the trigger, Giles dashed the muzzle upwards, and it exploded without doing the slightest injury to any one. There was no time to draw another, for he had to deal with one far more active as well as vigorous than himself; and he was prostrate upon his back, with Giles kneeling on his chest, before either the colonel or the landlord could interfere. Immediately a farther search took place, and a second pistol was found charged to the muzzle. And now being completely harmless, he was led, Giles guarding him on one side and the

landlord on the other, into the parlour of the Lion.

"What is it you want?" demanded the unhappy man. "I never struck a blow. I offered no resistance. I was drawn into it, I allow; but when the soldiers came I put out the lights and fled, and I can't tell who stabbed the policeman."

"Well, sir," replied the colonel, "we shall hear all that you have to say by-and-by; and I warn you to be careful lest you commit yourself. If, indeed, you be willing to make a confession, I will receive it; but I tell you, before you utter a syllable, that it will avail you nothing. And now, sir," continued he, turning to Giles, "what may the information be which you have to communicate?"

"I have nothing whatever to say, sir," replied Giles, "as to the grave offence in which the prisoner has implicated himself. Mine is a charge of a different nature. I accuse him of having murdered, on the night of the ninth of March 1814, an unfortunate girl in this parish, called Mary Tapsal."

Giles no sooner pronounced his charge, than the whole frame of the prisoner shook as with an ague fit: he reeled, staggered, and

would have fallen, had not the landlord supported him; yet he recovered his self-possession almost immediately, and peremptorily denied the charge.

"Please your worship, this man, of whom I know nothing, accuses me of a crime which is well known to have been committed by one Giles Solley, a fellow who kept the young woman company, and fled immediately after he had killed her. Let him state his grounds for the charge, and I undertake very easily to rebut them."

"First of all," said Giles, "may I request your worship to summon hither Margaret Oldfield, the wife of William Oldfield of the parish of Peckham, who formerly lived as housemaid in the family of the Rev. Mr. Jacobson? I shall also want the evidence of James Spark, foreman to Mr. Farrier, the blacksmith."

When the prisoner heard the names of these witnesses, his confidence appeared again to be shaken: yet he made a vigorous effort; and by the time the woman arrived, which was not till the expiration of nearly half an hour, he was perfectly composed. Meanwhile the cobbler, having heard of what was in progress, did not

wait to be sent for, but made his appearance in the justice-room, wielding the hammer with which the first blow was supposed to have been struck. Nor was Mr. Jacobson long after him, nor Mr. Sankey, nor Mr. Rigden, nor any others of the parties who had formerly given evidence on the inquest; while the coroner himself being summoned, it was resolved, in case other clues should fail, to have recourse to the book in which he had entered the particulars of the case. Some time was unavoidably occupied in making these arrangements, but they were completed at last; and the colonel, with paper and pens before him, sat down to carry through what all present felt to be a most interesting and important investigation.

The first evidence examined was, of course, the accuser, who gave his name John Tomkins. He began by stating that he was in the churchyard of Waltham during the evening libelled; and being hidden behind a buttress, overheard a conversation between Thomas Overy and the deceased young woman. He described it almost word for word as it has been given here, so deep and so terrible had been the impression made on his memory. While this was doing,

Overy repeatedly gasped for breath. At length he interrupted the speaker by exclaiming—

"That 's false, that 's false! I did not persuade her to swear the child to another. I did not urge her to marry Giles Solley."

"So, then," observed the colonel, "you had a conversation with the ill-fated woman on the evening of her death? No wonder that you were so well able to guide the seekers to the spot where the body lay."

The prisoner groaned deeply; while Mrs. Oldfield, now freed from all apprehensions of getting herself into trouble, disclosed, what it appeared she had known all along, that Mary Tapsal went abroad on the night of the murder for the express purpose of meeting Tom Overy. Then followed the evidence of Jem Spark, who proved that Giles Solley had, in his presence, returned the hammer to Tom Overy six days previous to the girl's death. And last of all came the testimony of Mr. Sankey, Mr. Rigden, and others, who all swore to the false statements which he had made at the inquest, respecting Solley's dress, and the hour at which he passed him.

"And now," observed the colonel, "before I

call upon this wretched man to plead, permit me to inquire, Mr. Tomkins, by what extraordinary means you have been enabled to trace this foul deed to the real perpetrator, and to clear the memory of an innocent man from undeserved obloquy ?"

Giles answered without a moment's hesitation, " Sir, I am not John Tomkins ; I am Giles Solley himself."

A shout burst from every lip except that of Overy, which quivered, expanded, and then closed again firmly. His eye lost its fire; his voice was hoarse and husky, while he said, " It 's no use denying it. I did the deed, and I must suffer for it."

The remainder of this history may be given in few words. Tom Overy being tried at Maidstone, was condemned to be executed, and his body given for dissection. During the interval between the passing of that sentence and his well-merited death, he made a disclosure of all the crimes that he had perpetrated ; among which was included, not only his abuse of Dick Solley's easy temper, but a base act of treachery which he had played off on Giles. It appeared that, allured by the prospect of a rewrad, he had communicated to Mr. Sankey the

sort of duty which he was called upon to perform as Giles's amanuensis; taking care, of course, to exaggerate Giles's delinquencies, and to accuse him of purposes which he never meditated. The result was the concoction of a false letter, under Mr. Sankey's inspection, which was put into the post-office instead of the true one; and eventually the harsh refusal made to the widow's request of keeping on the farm. With the share which he had in the Cato-street conspiracy, I have here no concern. He avowed it, and therefore it may be believed; but as no public notice was ever taken of the matter, it does not stand in record against him Nor, to say the truth, did he stand in need of any accession to his crimes, whose hands were red with the blood of the woman whom he had seduced, and who made use of the unsuspecting nature of his friend, to lead him into vice and ruin.

With respect to Giles himself, no sooner was his case stated to Lord Brambling, than he received ample satisfaction. Large farms not being now the profitable things that they had been during the war, Mr. Rigden was easily induced to sever Crackstakes from Gorse Hall; and some sixty acres being added to the former,

Giles entered once more into possession. I need not add, that his mother, with her two young children, went with him; and that the order of domestic life became among them again what it used to be in the days of the old man. But no entreaties on his mother's part, nor any working of compassion in his own breast, could prevail upon Giles to treat Dick as a brother. "Had he been guilty of mere extravagance and folly, I could have looked over it," said he; "but to treat his widowed mother so! No, no! Dick must now be to me as a stranger." And Giles kept his word; for, except that he occasionally employed him, and paid him for his work, he took of Dick no notice.

THE VILLAGE ORACLE.

THE VILLAGE ORACLE.

CHAPTER I.

BAD TIMES.

Between the date of the last of the occurrences described in the foregoing history, and the first of those which are to form the subject of the following narrative, an interval of very nearly twelve years is supposed to have intervened. It was a period, as all must feel who are old enough to recollect it, not merely full of excitement in reference to scenes immediately in progress, but pregnant with great events in the future. The expectations which men had formed relative to the effects of peace seemed all to have failed them. Poverty, universal poverty, had followed in its train; for commerce everywhere languished, manufac-

tures everywhere ceased, and agriculture itself went rapidly to decay. It is true that many causes contributed to bring about these effects, of which little heed was taken at the moment. The most vigilant government in the world, for example, could not have secured to its own subjects a monopoly of the carrying trade at a time when the seas were open to the ships of all nations. In like manner it was impossible to force British-manufactured goods into markets where people were unwilling to receive them, while the cessation of that prodigious demand for provisions, which a war waged over the whole surface of the globe had occasioned, could not but produce a great fall in the prices of agricultural commodities. Neither the merchant, nor the manufacturer, nor the farmer, however, thought of these things, or strove to adapt his habits and his ideas to the altered state of his circumstances. On the contrary, each and all continued to live and to speculate as they had been accustomed to do under a totally different state of affairs, and when poverty pinched, or ruin overtook them, they complained only of the ignorance of those to whom they had committed the le-

gislative trust, and the wanton cruelty of their rulers.

Wherever the social system rests on a foundation so artificial as this, the seeds of discontent, of sedition, and of every other offence against the public weal, must be thickly sown; and to foster and bring these to maturity, a very slender share of industry and talent are required. Mankind are always ready to believe those who tell them that their sufferings, when they do suffer, are brought about by the faults of others; nor are there wanting, during times of distress, zealous apostles of that doctrine. Among the manufacturing population, for example, a cry was soon heard, that their privations were owing entirely to the injustice of the corn-laws; the decaying corn-grower, on the other hand, clamoured for a higher protecting duty, and for increased facilities of purchasing his excisable necessaries at a cheap rate. Meanwhile the monied interests, as fundholders and dealers in stock, declared that there never could be anything like security in the market till the issues of paper were materially curtailed. How could any government proceed under such circumstances? Rulers are but men after all,

subject to the same infirmities and swayed by the same motives as other men, of whom it is as absurd as it is iniquitous to expect more than that they will act for the best; and if they cannot succeed in allaying the winds and waves with a word, are they to be reproached for the absence of power to work miracles? In the present instance, the British government did its best to meet the wishes and satisfy the wants of the people. Seeing that it was no longer possible to command a monopoly of the commerce of the world, what has been called the reciprocity system was adopted. Free trade became the fashion of the hour, and the principle of free trade was sanctioned by act of parliament. In the same spirit the corn-laws underwent such revisions as brought the duty on imported grain down from what had amounted almost to a virtual prohibition, and fixed it at a scale that varied in proportion both to the demand and the supply. Last of all, an edict went forth which, prohibiting the issue of one-pound notes, struck at the root of all the country bankers' profits, and gold and silver became again the current coin of the realm. There was not one of these arrangements which failed at the moment to receive the approbation of

the sages, though the benefits anticipated from them did not flow either so directly or so rapidly as could have been wished. How may the fact be accounted for?

As I am not writing a history of the transactions of the last twenty years, and have nothing to do in this place with the condition of the manufacturing population, I leave to some other and abler chronicler the task of making out for them what case he can. In reference to the agriculturists also, it is perhaps more easy to follow the progress of events as they developed themselves, than to trace back effects to their true causes. There are, however, certain matters on record, of which the proofs lie so completely upon the surface, that I am not afraid of committing any error by referring to them. In the first place, there needs no argument to show, that habits acquired in youth and in the vigour of early manhood are not easily abandoned in maturity. Bad as the times were from 1818 to 1829, they did not wholly eradicate the caste of fox-hunting, champagne-drinking, and phaeton-driving tenants. With respect again to the ladies, their style of dress, their habits in the domestic circle, and their general demeanour at home and abroad,

were certainly not of a nature to induce a conviction in the breast of the looker-on that they were the wives or daughters of poor men. To be sure, silks, laces, gloves, ribbons, &c. were all considerably cheaper in 1828 than they had been in 1813, and so far lay more within the reach of those who possessed the means of purchasing: but as the true value of any article is to be estimated by the consumer according to his own ability to pay for it, and not according to the price which it fetches in the market, so the husband and father of a bevy of well-dressed persons, haranguing from his town-built carriage, was not very likely to excite commiseration when he spoke of the derangement of his affairs, and attributed the whole blame to the government of his country.

It was not, however, of the government alone that the farmer now complained. Rents were said to be ruinously high, tithes ground him to the dust, and the little profits that might have remained after these demands were settled, disappeared altogether in the vortex of the poor-rates. Now it might or it might not be true, that landlords still required for their farms more than the farms were worth; but if it were true, the farmers had themselves alone to

thank for it. The competition for land continued as great as it had ever been. Was there an estate in the market? If offered for sale, there were dozens eager to purchase; if to let, there were scores ready to hire. How then was it possible for the landlords to believe that they did exact more than the tenants were in a condition to pay? And as to tithes, they were precisely what they had ever been, with this remarkable exception, that, generally speaking, the clergy entered into compositions, to which of course the farmers assented, because they were advantageous; whereas lay-impropriators almost always took their tithe in kind. Yet it was not of the proceedings of the lay-impropriator that complaints were ever made. The clergy were traduced as oppressors, because they dealt more leniently with their parishioners than they might have done; and with respect to the poor-rates, how could these fail of hanging round the agriculturist's neck like a mill-stone, under such circumstances as the following?

During the good times of the war, when the demand for labour was great, working men received as wages half-a-crown a day. At seasons of extraordinary pressure, such as harvest,

haying, and the like, they might earn three, and sometimes four shillings. At that period wheat sold for ninety or one hundred shillings a quarter. All the other necessaries of life, including sugar, tea, fuel, clothing, were in the same proportion; yet the working people throve and were contented. The poor-rates were not then heavy; though, when a family did become chargeable, it was very liberally dealt with, for no one grudged the comforts to which its members had been accustomed, and which it cost the community a mere trifle to supply. The return of peace reversed this order of things. There was a greater demand for employment than could be met; the prices of all consumable articles fell; yet neither the wages of the workman, nor the amount of relief granted to the pauper, kept pace with them. During the latter part of the war a wretched custom had crept in of granting to all large families a sort of annuity out of the poor-rates. The practice was not only continued, but rendered more general, after the peace. No matter whether the man was in steady employment or the reverse, his wife received from the committee an allowance every week for every child of which she was the mother, above some esta-

blished number; while those who could not find, or did not choose to find, employment anywhere, derived all their subsistence from the parish. Nor did the evil end here. The labourers constantly appealing from the vestry to the bench of magistrates, and the bench somewhat incautiously giving orders for employment or relief, there sprang up a habit of combining the two into one, till at last a large proportion of the work on each farm was paid for out of the sums collected from the parishioners at large under the authority of a poor-rate. No wonder that the tenant complained of the amount of a burthen which his own proceedings tended to increase from day to day; or that the result of returns demanded by the House of Commons was to show that, if things went on a few years longer as they had done in times past, the whole profits of the land would be required to maintain the labourers alone.

When it came to this, a new set of persons began to take an interest in the management of parochial affairs. There were in all parishes a greater or less number of families who did not derive their support, at least directly, from the land, and who were therefore entitled to

call in question the justice of a policy which required them to pay any portion of the wages of the farm-servants. The little shopkeeper, indeed, was not of that number, for he knew well, that if his poor-rates were somewhat too heavy, he received back again in the custom of the well-paid pauper much more than his share of that pauper's pay; but the retired tradesman, the apothecary, the carpenter, the blacksmith, the clergyman—every individual, in short, not actually benefited by the system, complained. There was no possibility of putting down such complaints by argument, and the illegality of paying any portion of the men's wages out of the rate was shown. Of course this drove the farmer to the adoption of a new system. He began to discover that it was out of all reason to continue the same payments to his men that he had been in the habit of making when corn was at the highest. Wages were accordingly reduced; and though the people grumbled, they were either convinced that the proceeding was a fair one, or, knowing that they could not help themselves, they submitted. So far the tenant did no more than the circumstances of the case warranted; but having once tasted the sweets of reduction, he fancied that he could

not obtain too much of it, and he proceeded farther with his devices.

Wherever there was courage enough to attempt it, and the magistrates gave their support, the vestries cut off the whole or a portion of the extra allowances which had hitherto been granted to large families. They still, indeed, assisted such families by giving them something towards the payment of their rent and the purchase of clothing, and encouraged thereby the speculators in cottages to keep up the prices, while they totally discountenanced the formation of habits of economy among the people. But with the view of counterbalancing the change thus created, they dealt, as they conceived, very wisely with single men. No matter what a man's character might be, he could not, if he had but himself to keep, obtain employment on almost any terms. No; the large families must be maintained, and it was desirable to get some return for what they cost: the unmarried man, therefore, if he desired to get a job at all, must bribe the farmer to give it, by undertaking to work for half the ordinary wages. I need not say that the direct consequences of such a system were universal discontent, and a rapid increase of improvident

marriages. For two men worked side by side in the same field; the one, who was young, healthy, robust, and willing, did twice as much as his lazy and feeble neighbour; for which he was gratified at the week's end by perceiving that while he got his six or seven shillings, the other obtained twelve or fourteen. It was to no purpose that the employer reminded him that the bad workman was paid so much more than he in justice to his family; "Very well," was the answer, "I will try to get a family too;" and till that object *was* attained the words of complaint were never out of the young man's mouth.

All this while the great object of the farmer was to wring from his landlord a reduction of rents, from the parson a reduction of tithes, and from the government a reduction of taxes. Trusting, moreover, to succeed as much through the fears as the good feeling of these several parties, he was in too many instances prompt to encourage the circulation of newspapers which, besides launching out in abuse of the established institutions of the country, filled their columns with atrocious libels upon the higher orders. A reform in parliament likewise, which used to be the panacea among the manu-

facturers, alone, began to be looked for in the agricultural districts also as the remedy for all evils; and publications which advocated that were greedily devoured, even when there accompanied the editor's reasoning hints utterly subversive of all honesty between man and man. For a while the farmer flattered himself that all this would answer his purpose. He was happy in the belief that he was himself represented as one of the sufferers from the cruelty of those above him; and that he, and his allies of the press would succeed in convincing the pauper that with him neither landlord nor parson had any community of feeling. But this could not last for ever. The labourers *felt* the load which immediately bore upon them, while they were only *told* of those still more heavy loads which caused the pressure; and the miscreants who had hitherto directed their fury against the highest classes exclusively soon perceived how the land lay, and took advantage of it. For men who write for the passions, not for the reason and moral sense, of the poor, care not who may be the victims, so that they succeed in stirring up strife. It was no longer on the squire or the parson only that abuse was heaped; the cruelties perpetrated at vestries,

the injustice of denying relief to an applicant, no matter how undeserving,—the barbarity and inhumanity of reducing the industrious classes to a universal pauperism,—these were now the favourite topics on which to declaim, till minds already exasperated by real or imaginary wrongs lost their balance entirely. There must be some other cause than the exactions of landlords and parsons for the sufferings of the poor. There was such a cause. When so many men were out of employ, why should the farmer use machinery in any case? and why, if the land could not pay for cultivation, keep it in the hands of a few, when there were multitudes ready to take and make a profit of it? Such was the state of public feeling at Waltham when this history opens: of the consequence to which it led, the history itself gives a disclosure.

CHAPTER II.

A POOR MAN'S FRIEND.

It was on a beautiful morning towards the end of July, when the corn had attained to its full growth, and the dingy green of the blade was in many places beginning to merge into yellow, that there appeared over the door of a shop in Waltham, which for some time had stood vacant, the following announcement, inscribed in bright gilt letters: "London House Establishment—Ready-money prices—Twenty per cent. under prime cost. James Marshall, licensed dealer in groceries, from Messrs. Peel and Pepperpod, Great Cumberland-street, Borough." The trap had been arranged and baited for the simple folks of Waltham with consummate skill. For some days previously they were indeed aware that the shop in question had found a tenant; for the carpenter

had been employed to put up some shelves; and sundry chests and boxes, addressed to Mr. J. Marshall, had arrived from London by the van, though they were still in the keeping of the landlord of the Lion. But of the kind of business which the new tenant proposed to carry on, no one knew anything; neither was it certain that the packages in question were designed for him. When, therefore, the light of a new day displayed to their admiring gaze a sign so attractive as that of which I have transcribed the legend, the effect produced was in every respect such as Mr. Marshall could have wished. Men proceeding to their labour in the fields stopped and read, and then went back to inform their wives. The wives, so soon as their children were packed off to school, sallied forth to reconnoitre; and though it was yet but the middle of the week, Marshall's shop became, within the space of one day, a perfect thoroughfare. I do not know whether the till received that day any large accession of silver and copper coin; but that Mr. Marshall himself had succeeded in making a very favourable impression on the minds of the ladies, the return of Saturday night made manifest.

The individual who had thus contrived to establish by a sort of *coup-de-main* the most thriving business in Waltham, was about three-and-thirty years of age, or perhaps a year or two less. His external appearance was very different from that of village traders in general. A complexion differing little in hue from that of an Italian, yet singularly clear and healthy; hair and whiskers black as the raven's wing; an aquiline nose; teeth white and strong; a mouth full of expression, of which it was not always an easy matter to read the meaning;—these, with a figure little if at all surpassing the middle stature, but moulded upon nature's most accurate model, made up altogether such a personage as one does not see every day standing behind a counter either in town or country. Nor was it only in his outward appearance that he differed widely from those of his class in general—his manners were attractive in a remarkable degree.

Gentle, obliging, kind, taking no account of personal trouble, and evidently disposed to think well of all with whom he conversed, Mr. Marshall not only won golden opinions from such as frequented his shop, but gradually obtained over them a sort of influence for

which they found it difficult to account. The fact however was, that Mr. Marshall possessed not only a more than common stock of knowledge, but far more than a common stock of philanthropy. He was aware of the sort of goods of which poor men's families stood most in need; and though at a clear loss to himself, would often dissuade the wife from laying out her money to a disadvantage. But this was not all: he was a patient — nay, a sympathising listener to every tale of distress. His own means were not extensive, to be sure; yet he had always a trifling article to bestow on such as needed it. An extra ounce of tea, or the remnant of a cask of butter, was often thrown in where it seemed peculiarly acceptable: and then all his weights and measures were capital. No wonder that Mr. Marshall should have become a mighty favourite with such as loved to hear themselves talk, and whose favourite topic was of course their own sufferings, attributable, not to any negligence or mismanagement at home, but to the barbarity of employers and parish officers.

The result of all this was, that long before a sickle had been put into the harvest, Marshall was decidedly at the head of the grocery

concern, not only in Waltham, but in the neighbouring parishes. The labouring people universally gave him their custom; and the excellent report which they conveyed to the market-gardeners induced many of them to support him also; for he was an accommodating as well as a liberal trader. In spite of the intimation conveyed by his sign, that he purposed to deal for ready money only, his heart proved a great deal too tender to be guided by motives of prudence alone. First one, and then another needy family, got into his debt. To be sure they belonged, one and all, to a class which could not be expected to keep above the world; they were parties receiving parochial relief, not one of whom could command more than fifteen shillings weekly, while a large majority could not muster thirteen. And then when the single men came to him, stating fairly at the outset that they never earned more than six shillings, how could a man of his temper press for ready money, when the consequence of his doing so would have been, that the poor fellows must go without their beer, and of course be deprived of the instruction which was communicated to them by the readers in the Anchor tap.

Now Mr. Marshall was one of those who held in unmitigated abhorrence the idea of stinting the poor man in his innocent enjoyments. He was, moreover, a decided friend to the diffusion of knowledge; and held it to be a violation of the first law of nature, that by the rich the pleasures of life should be engrossed, while the poor had all the labour. And as to the arguments of such as spoke of the justice and the necessity among all classes of cutting men's coats according to their cloth, that he regarded as one of the old-fashioned maxims of which time had exposed the sophistry. The pauper might depend for existence itself on the bounty of others, while the landed proprietor owned a large tract of country. Still, the pauper had just as good a right to drink his beer and read his newspaper, as the landlord to swill his claret and study geology.

I need not add, that Mr. Marshall's reasoning was pronounced unanswerable by the frequenters of his shop; and as he followed it up by permitting his customers to contract debts rather than squeeze from them the money which was required at the public-house, he never wanted either listeners at home or trumpeters to sound his praises abroad.

Over two grades in the society of Waltham Mr. Marshall thus established an influence: his efforts to insinuate himself into the good graces of a third were not so immediately successful. By the farmers in general he was regarded with distrust. It is true that his political principles were found upon inquiry to agree pretty nearly with those of what was called the Blue party. He was a strenuous advocate of parliamentary reform; he hated the very name of the pension list, and denounced all taxation as iniquitous and oppressive. The parsons were in his eyes worthy of all possible detestation; and as to the national debt, he contended that there was but one way of dealing with it. What right had our ancestors to contract engagements, and then leave us to settle them? He was friendly to Cobbett's scheme; the sponge—the sponge would put all to rights; and then, in order to prevent the possible accumulation of new embarrassments, a new order of things ought to be instituted. In the first place, those who conducted the affairs of government ought to accept of no pecuniary remuneration: the honour and the patronage were quite sufficient for them. In the next place, persons offering

themselves as candidates for seats in parliament ought to be tied down by the most solemn pledges never to vote away public money without the consent of their constituents. Let all this be done, and church property applied to its right uses — the maintenance of the poor, and he would answer for it that the country would thrive. It was rather remarkable that though both Mr. Sankey and Mr. Rigden agreed in the main with these sentiments, they still kept aloof from giving their countenance to him who expressed them. But that which words cannot bring about, deeds will now and then accomplish.

"You seem out of sorts to-day, Redman," said Marshall, one Saturday evening, to a customer from the neighbouring parish of Appleby;—"have you lost your employ, or what is the matter?"

"No," answered the man; "in that respect I am just where I was. But it's enough to put anybody out of sorts to get the summons that our constable served on me yesterday. D—n him! he's always about some mischief to poor men."

"Don't blame the constable," replied Marshall; "he is but the instrument; he can't help

himself. But what is the summons about? I know you all give a great deal too much rent for your houses, and it is an infamous shame that you should be called upon to pay poor-cess. But your landlord can't summon you here, at least; and as to poor-rates——"

"It 's not for poor-cess," interrupted Redman; "it 's for tithes. Here 's a demand on me for the tithe of my 'tatoe-garden, that never was rated before; I must pay it between this and Tuesday next, or else I 'm to be had up afore the magistrates."

"For tithes!" exclaimed Marshall, while his quick eye sparkled with delight. "Oh! that 's quite another matter. D—n the parson! never think of paying him; let him do his worst. If he dare to go on with the business, let him look to it. A parson is the best of all oppressors to deal with."

"But we don't pay to the parson. I wish we did. He 's a kind-hearted man, and would let us off easy. We pay to Muster Harrison."

"That alters the case," replied Marshall, a little taken aback; "but doesn't Muster Harrison hire the tithes of the archbishop?"

"Oh yes!" answered Redman,—"he 's what they call the lessee."

"Well, well," replied Marshall, "that will do just as well. We can easily give out that the archbishop gets an enormous rent for his tithes, and that the lessee is obliged to grind the poor man to the dust, otherwise he could not pay at all. And then there 's the case of the perpetual curate. Hang it, I don't much like saying a kind thing of any parson, but we may use him as a weapon with which to knock down his superior. He 's very badly paid, isn't he?"

"They say he is, but I can't tell. I only know he never complains, and seems very comfortable."

"That 's a pity; but it won't make any odds in our hands. Let me see the summons."

The summons was shown, conned over, and left in Mr. Marshall's hands. Not long, however, was it the sole document of the kind submitted to his consideration; for Redman no sooner made his neighbours aware of the interest which Mr. Marshall had taken in his affairs, than they also in great numbers flocked over to Waltham. The consequence was, that a large portion of Sunday was spent by him in receiving the visits of his poor customers,

and in listening to their complaints of oppression. From the latter he learned that some misunderstanding having arisen between the tithe-payers and the tithe-receiver in Appleby, a fresh survey of the parish had taken place. This necessarily brought the fact to light, that there were on all the farms multitudes of small holdings—two acres or an acre and a half here and there, attached to the cottages—for which the tenants had hitherto paid tithe in the lump, but for which, on the plea that they themselves made nothing of them, they refused to pay any longer. What was the lessee to do? He selected certain plots of land well stocked with potatoes, by far the most valuable crop that is reared from the land; and not being affected by any nice considerations as to the condition of the actual occupants, he resolved to demand the tithes of them. But the occupants being merely labouring men who had prevailed on their masters to sublet these gardens, never contemplated the possibility that such a charge could be made, and refusing point blank to enter into any arrangement, had all been summoned to the monthly meeting at Waltham as defaulters. There could not be a case more perfectly to Marshall's

cudgels against Mr. Marshall, and, after sundry inquiries, elicited two admissions; first, that though the cottagers never had paid tithes, the land before it came into their occupation was always titheable; next, that the lessee, on finding that he was no longer to look to their landlords for payment, had served each of them with a proper legal notice to set out his tithes in kind. All therefore that he now sought was a fair compensation for such tithe, seeing that they had neglected to pay attention to the notice served upon them. There was no getting over stubborn facts like these. Mr. Marshall, after a vain attempt to browbeat the parson-magistrate, which ended in an announcement, that if he did not treat the bench with becoming respect he would be ejected, withdrew, and a large majority of those who had put themselves under his protection were sentenced not only to pay to the lessee his dues, but to defray the costs of the prosecution.

CHAPTER III.

A MAN OF AUTHORITY.

The impression produced upon the society of Waltham and its neighbourhood by the part which he had played in this tithe prosecution was in every respect favourable to Mr. Marshall. The labouring classes, including the small market-gardeners, an order of men who work harder if they do not fare worse than almost any other, looked up to him as their protector against oppression; while the farmers in general, but especially the Blues, spoke of him as a monstrous clever fellow, who must have beaten the whole bench had that cursed parson only kept away. Among these there was one so peculiarly circumstanced, that it will be necessary to give some account of him, more especially as the official situation which he chanced to hold gave him considerable influence in the

parish; and it was a great matter for Mr. Marshall to have that influence exerted in his favour.

Mr. Thomas Amos, at this time overseer of the poor in Waltham, had inherited, when very young, a moiety of the tithes of Appleby; the other moiety being bequeathed to his sister, then a girl, but who had since married the prosecutor in the late actions. For many years, that is to say, throughout the good times of the war, Mr. Amos hired her portion from his sister, and, living in Appleby, collected the whole of the tithes of the parish in kind, and with a rigid hand. Holding the lease moreover on very easy terms, as well with reference to the archbishop as to his relative, he found himself in the enjoyment of a large income, which he spent among cock-fighters, card-players, boxers, and other flash people, with the utmost fairness and liberality. In his personal habits, likewise, he was the very *beau idéal* of a gay, jovial, thriving yeoman of Kent. Nobody throughout the surrounding districts rode such excellent horses, or dressed with greater taste than he; and among the women he was said to be irresistible; for, in addition to a striking exterior and an athletic form, he

could boast of manners which, in his own sphere, were regarded as princely. And his accomplishments were in every respect in agreement with his exterior. Mr. Amos was a dead shot, a fearless hunter, a skilful dancer, an expert pugilist. He was likewise a man of courage as well as of gallantry; indeed, he was known to have fought at least one duel with a subaltern officer in a marching regiment, in vindication of his right to the smiles of a pretty servant girl whom the jealous soldier took it into his head to watch too closely. But the traits of character on which, above all others, Mr. Amos piqued himself, were his unyielding resolution and his bold infidelity. Let him once pledge his word to anything, and there was no degree of trouble or expense that he would not undergo to redeem it. Let him once utter a threat, and no consideration of pity or remorse would hinder him from carrying it into execution. In like manner, his play, whether in the cock-pit, at the billiard-table, or elsewhere, was perfectly fair; and he paid his debts, as well to tradesmen as to sharpers, punctually. With respect again to religion, he held that as light as he held the restraints of moral obligation. Mr. Amos believed nothing, feared

nothing, hoped for nothing beyond the present state of existance; and he was a great deal too honest to act the hypocrite. On the contrary, Sunday was with him the busiest day in the week; and, as if to mark the contempt in which he held the prejudices of others, Sunday was the day on which he made it a rule to go abroad in his shabbiest attire. When I add, that Mr. Amos was from his boyhood a friend of the people, I have said enough to set his general character in its true light.

The arrival of bad times affected no one more distressingly than Mr. Amos. It is true that his leasehold property was still valuable, and that a man of prudent habits might have lived very comfortably upon it; but Mr. Amos's habits had never been prudent. In his vices, on the contrary, he had always been extravagant; for, besides keeping himself constantly within water-mark by the strictness with which he discharged his debts of honour, more than one female had legal claims on him for a pension. When a reverse came, therefore, Mr. Amos had no fund laid up wherewith to meet it; and he was a great deal too high-spirited to sail, as he himself expressed it, under false colours. The consequence was, that after

hanging on for a while in the groundless hope that times might mend, this singular man all at once changed his habits of living entirely. He had taken into keeping a woman of low origin, by whom he had a family. He now withdrew from society altogether, and confined himself to her. From the best dressed man in the parish he became the most perfect sloven. His game-cocks were sold, his hunters were disposed of, his groom was dismissed. With his gay companions, among whom it was hinted that the celebrated Thurtell and Hunt had been numbered, he broke off all connexion; and adopting the habits of a boor, he lived entirely in his kitchen. The character of the man, however, continued to be as fully exhibited in every action of his life as it had ever been. He was still a man of his word. In his debasement he was not less ostentatious than he had been in his elevation; and in politics and religion he became more and more liberal every day. One little statement more illustrative of the temper of his mind, and I resume my narrative.

Mr. Amos had continued to hire his sister's portion of their joint property up to the period when difficulties began to arise in settling for their small tithes with the farmers. When

this befel, he became all at once tired of the business, and having himself taken a farm in Waltham, expressed great anxiety to remove thither. Accordingly his brother-in-law was persuaded to change positions with him. No sooner was this done, however, than Mr. Amos declared himself, in all companies, an enemy to the tithe system. It was a positive robbery of the occupier; and for his part he would, though depending on it mainly for his own subsistence, lend a willing hand to get rid of it altogether. Of course such language, coming from one who was known to be himself a lessee, but who was not generally known to have sub-let his portion for a term of years, was pronounced liberal in the extreme; and when party spirit began to run high, no man proved more active, or was more looked up to among the Blues, than Mr. Amos.

It was about the hour of noon, on the day after the trial, when Marshall, after serving a customer or two, was standing at the back of his counter, that a tall stout man, dressed in a filthy fustian shooting-jacket, cord breeches clouted at the knees, grey worsted stockings, and huge hob-nailed boot-shoes, with an old blue cap upon his head and a bludgeon in his

hand, entered the shop. The trader immediately recognised the overseer, whose costume was as conspicuous as his habits were notorious; and not doubting as to the cause which had led to the honour now conferred upon him, he made haste to throw into his manner the sort of air which he calculated would best please his visitor. For, of all living men, your liberals, especially in the country, are tenacious of the respect due to their sense of personal dignity. Mr. Amos, to be sure, was not one of those who delighted in receiving marks of obsequious attention. Unprincipled—that is to say, totally wanting in religious principle—he might be; but he was manly, and had therefore no desire to be fawned upon. But he, like all others of his order, had his own notions of what was due to himself; and he never came in contact with a more exact observer of such forms than the individual before whom he now presented himself. Their salutation was accordingly blunt and straightforward on both sides, though slightly tinged—and only very slightly—with deference on the part of the grocer.

"I did not give you credit," said Mr. Amos, "for half so much sharpness as I see you have. I confess that I was inclined to suspect you;—

at all events I had no desire to know anything about you till yesterday. But you managed that case so well that, d—n me, I believe you are one of the right sort, and I mean to become acquainted with you."

"Mr. Amos's principles are too well known, and too highly esteemed, for me not to be proud of his approbation," replied Marshall. "There is real liberality when a man goes against his own interests, and denounces a system upon which his family has thriven, because it is shown to be mischievous to his country."

"As to that," rejoined the overseer, "I take no great merit to myself. Any man with half an eye must see that this order of things can't go on; for, with the landlord first, the parson next, the tax-gatherer next, and the poor-rate to crown all, devil take me if I know how the farmer is to live. I wish I had as much power to deal with the three first of these nuisances, as I am happy to say I have to deal with the last.

"The poor-rates are a great burthen, without doubt," observed Marshall. "But how are the poor to do without parish relief? To be sure, if we had church property applied to its legiti-

mate uses, then nobody would feel the burthen; but, till that time comes, it won't do to let the poor man go without bread."

"That is, Mr. Marshall, you shopkeepers don't object to a high poor-rate, because the paupers are able, in consequence, to lay out more money across your counters. But that won't do for me. No, curse me! I have no notion of paying a man more than he earns; and if he don't earn sixpence, why should the parish be bound to make up his wages to two shillings?"

"It seems very hard, I admit. Still, remember that the poor man must live; and that the more heavily you and I, and others like us, are burthened to keep him, the better disposed shall we be, when the proper time comes, to set all to rights by a few healthy changes."

"That is, Marshall, you would like to unship kings and bishops and lords, and all that sort of nonsense; and to have nobody that would pretend to hold his head higher than yours and mine."

"There would be some good in that, doubtless," replied the trader; "but even that of itself would not do. What right has Lord

Brambling to half this country-side, while I don't own a rood of land, and you pay rent for what you use?"

"None whatever. And yet, I am not sure neither that he hasn't the very same right to his dirty acres that you have to these boxes of tea and canisters of snuff."

"I paid money for these boxes of tea and canisters of snuff. Did Lord Brambling pay money for his dirty acres?"

"No; but his ancestors did."

"Doubtless; and these ancestors of his saddled you and me with our portions of what is called the national debt. Do you think they had any right to do that?"

"Cobbett says they had none: and Cobbett is a monstrous shrewd fellow. Yet—"

"Why, there you are now! You acknowledge that our ancestors had no right to burthen us in one way; and yet you hesitate about denying their right to burthen us in another. Don't you see, that whenever property gets into masses, the community suffers? And is not property got into masses, when it goes, as in Lord Brambling's case, in the line of families?"

"There is some truth in that, to be sure.

But have a care; for the doctrine that you are preaching now is exactly what the parsons preach. They tell us, that the people, by sweeping away church property, will only injure themselves: and neither you nor I can deny that church property is open to all men."

"Pooh, pooh! that's all stuff. Church property is public property. It was given by the state; and it may be taken away by the state, especially if we can once convince the public that it ought to go for the maintenance of the poor."

"D—n the poor!" replied Mr. Amos. "I hate the aristocracy, I own; but I hate the poor just as much. They are constantly imposing upon us. They don't care to seek for work, so long as they have a parish to come to; and unless the whole system of poor-rates be abolished, this country will never thrive. I am for every man getting what he earns himself, —but no more."

"Please, sir," interrupted a sickly-looking man who entered the shop at this moment; "may I have my pay? I couldn't attend the 'mittee yesterday, 'cause I was so poorly; and my wife is ill too, or she would have come for me."

"No, curse you! not a farthing," answered the overseer. "I gave you orders to come every day; and if you don't choose to obey them, you shall get no relief from me. I suppose you were at work, if the truth was known, and want now to get double pay?"

"Indeed, sir, I was not able to work. Indeed, sir, I have been in bed these three days; and my family might have starved, but for the charity of some kind gentlefolks in the town. And if you don't give me my pay now, we shall be turned into the street, and all our goods seized."

"You and your goods may all go to the devil for me!" answered the overseer. "Have you a doctor's certificate?"

"I have not, sir. I could not afford to pay for a doctor, and I thought my own looks would answer for me."

"You always looked like a hang-dog, I know," was the rejoinder, "and you keep your beauty wonderfully. But you may take your sweet face out of this as soon as you please; for, I tell you, you shall get nothing."

"Then I'll see what Colonel Hamilton will say to it," answered the man, bridling up.

"Do you threaten me, you rascal?" ex-

claimed the overseer. "If you don't make yourself scarce, I'll break your bones; and then you will have a better tale to tell when you are about it."

The pauper withdrew; but neither Mr. Amos nor Marshall had an opportunity of making a remark, when another entered.

"Please, sir, can you set me to work? I haven't had a job these three days, and am half-starved. I am willing to work for any wages you please to offer, so that I may keep soul and body together."

"What! is this you, Dick Solley? Isn't it a disgrace to a young man like you to apply to a parish officer for work or relief either? You might have been, and ought to have been, as well off as e'er a man in the parish. Besides, you are a single man; you have nobody to keep. How the devil do you expect that the parish should find work for you, when there are so many married men out of employ?"

"I don't ask for a married man's wages,—but I can't live upon air," replied Dick; "and, if I can t find work elsewhere, where am I to go but to the parish?"

"Why doesn't your brother find you in work? I have no job for you. All the jobs

that the parish has must be kept for married men. D—n you! don't you hear?" repeated he, stamping his foot; "must I say the same thing over and over again? I tell you I have no work for you; and if I had, you should not have it."

The man slunk away, muttering something which could not be distinctly overheard; while Mr. Amos, turning round, observed to his new acquaintance—"Can anything be more disgusting than all this! Here we are ground to the earth by the parsons, the aristocracy, and the Government; and required over and above to keep a set of lazy, idle rascals, who never do a day's work when you set them to it, and whose work, if it were ever so well done, would not make good their wages. For my part, I see only one cure for the evil. We must have Parliamentary Reform; and that will soon lead to a reduction of taxes and tithes and rents, and to a system of managing the poor which will at least make labour worth paying for. In the mean while, it is my duty, as overseer, to manage the affairs of the parish as economically as I can; and my chief object in calling here to-day was to desire that you send a dozen pounds of molasses to the workhouse.

The parishioners have hitherto very absurdly given the old and the sick wretches there expensive beer, made of malt and hops. If they must have beer,—for which I see no use,—I am determined that they shall have it at the most moderate rate; and as I have tried the molasses beer in my own family, I don't see why they should not have it in the workhouse. So, be sure you send up a dozen pounds some time this afternoon."

Marshall promised to attend to the order; and the overseer withdrew.

CHAPTER IV.

PARISH POLITICS.

If the season immediately preceding the harvest be in most districts one of considerable difficulty, particularly where there chances to be a redundant pauper population, the harvest itself, with the hopping that succeeds it, is a period of abundance, and of course of contentment. Harsh as the treatment received by the paupers might have been, therefore, no consequences worthy of notice immediately followed: for the sick man continued to find chance friends till he was capable of earning a subsistence for his family; and Dick Solley the bachelor got from time to time a day's work at Crackstakes, out of the profits of which, with such odd shillings as he picked up elsewhere, he made shift to live. But Time in his progress soon brought round the gloomy months, when, however willing the agriculturist may be,

he is incapacitated from finding employment out of doors for more than a very limited number of workmen. It was to no purpose that vestry-meetings assembled in Waltham to devise schemes which scarcely came into operation ere they fell to pieces: no permanent benefit accrued from them. Indeed, it was admitted on all hands, both by paupers and rate-payers, that though they had seen many bad winters, they had never witnessed one to be compared with this: for the former class bitterly complained over their ale and newspaper at the Anchor, that the gentlemen not only took no interest in their case, but added insult to oppression; while the latter protested, that they neither could nor would much longer endure the constantly increasing burthen of the cess. Of course the animosity of both was more and more exasperated by the comments of the writers, whose essays both delighted to study; till in the end it might have been foretold by the most careless observer that a rupture sooner or later would take place.

"Why is it, after all, Dick," said Marshall one evening to the younger Solley, "that your brother does not find you in constant work? He is at least as well off as any farmer in the

parish; and I do think that nature itself might induce him to look after his own flesh and blood."

"I have not a word to say against Giles," replied Dick. "He knows, and so do I, that I am without any claim upon him even for the help which he now and then affords me. But I never did the parish wrong; and my family have helped to maintain the poor long enough, one would think, to entitle the first that ever stood in need of relief to get it without grudging."

"Bah! Dick; I thought you had known better than that too. Does not the 'Mercury' tell you truly, that the overgrown farmer is just as great an enemy to the labouring man as the parson? Done the parish wrong! No, to be sure you have not. But you have done yourself great wrong. What was it the committee said to you last Tuesday, when you applied for relief?"

"That I was a single man, to be sure; and that it was a shame for me to ask relief of a parish, so long as the King wanted men by sea or land."

"And why are you a single man? Don't you see how it is?—they will neither relieve nor

employ you till they are obliged. But once get a wife, and all that is changed. Why don't you marry?"

"By G—d, you say right!" exclaimed Dick. "I will marry, if it be only to spite the parish."

"And so will I!" "And so will I!" shouted several voices at once. Neither were these vain threats: the very next Sunday not fewer than eight sets of bans were published in church; so that there was a prospect that within three weeks more the parish would have eight families to keep, in addition to those which it had previously supported.

The conversation described above, of which the consequences were so prompt and so mischievous, occurred in the tap-room of the Anchor, at the close of one of those periodical meetings of which I have previously spoken. Originating with a few of the more dissolute of the tradespeople, and countenanced for party purposes by Lord Brambling's tenantry, the club had gradually enlarged itself, till it now embraced almost every labouring man in the parish who preferred the society of a public-house to that of his own family, and could manage, by fair means or foul, to scrape together sixpence

wherewith to pay his shot. At first the chief business of the club was to drink and be merry. But when the bad times came, and money grew scarce, a new species of excitement took the place of intoxication, and men learned to keep their faculties under the control of something like reason, that they might exercise them in discussing the affairs of state, and the conduct and characters of their neighbours. It was then that the practice began, to which I have elsewhere alluded, and to which countenance was given by persons who, in some instances, believed that they were doing right, of having a newspaper read aloud for the edification of the club. Of course the paper introduced into such society could only be one of those which minister to the bad passions of the multitude; for it has not yet come to pass, either that the poor voluntarily seek for moral instruction in such places as the alehouse, or that the friends of order exert themselves to get the publications of which they approve circulated through so humble a channel. While therefore there sprang up everywhere a desire for information, accompanied by the habit of reasoning and commenting on the kind of knowledge obtained, no pains were taken to use it as an

instrument of good; and it became, as it always will when left to run wild, a terrible engine of mischief.

It had not escaped the observation of the persons who conducted this print, that in exact proportion to the zeal with which they seemed to espouse the quarrel of the poor against the rich, their own circulation became extended. By pouring out unceasing abuse upon the aristocracy and the clergy they had done something; they calculated that by turning their battery against the employers, and writing exclusively for the employed, they might do more. The experiment was tried, and proved quite successful. At first, indeed, the more respectable among the Blues objected to a system of perpetual libel, and refused to give their countenance to a publication which, however sound in its general views, committed gross injustice when treating of particular cases. So long, indeed, as the Rev. A. B., or Squire D., or Lord E., were the only sufferers, no great harm was done; but, when the editor began to protest against lowering the men's wages, to speak sneeringly of bull-frogs and harshly of parish tyrants, the case became different. And when at last he ventured to as-

sert that every farmer was an enemy to the poor who, in such times, dared to thresh out his corn by machinery, a buzz of indignation was heard in all quarters. Still there appeared, from time to time, so good an article on tithes, taxes, rents, or bloated parsons, that to discountenance entirely a fellow of such excellent wit and sterling ability could not be thought of. Therefore Mr. Sankey, Mr. Rigden, Mr. Amos, and such as they, continued not only themselves to read, but to circulate among the men, the Kent Mercury; fully assured that the men would forget all that was said disrespectfully of themselves, while they remembered only the lashings which were given to the classes above them.

Mr. Sankey, Mr. Rigden, and Mr. Amos, were not, any more than other men, gifted with the faculty of perfect prescience. The memories of the labouring people proved more tenacious than they had anticipated, and their judgments were of a far sounder order than had been supposed. The very same authority which required them to believe that all parsons were rapacious, and all men in authority corrupt, assured them that their own masters were brutes, and that no man possessed

of the feelings of a man could fill the office of parish overseer. Again, the people saw that where a threshing-machine is used, there is no need of men working with flails in the barns; and they perceived, both outwardly in their bodies and inwardly in their outraged feelings, that the overseer of Waltham, at least, was not given to temper power with mildness. From day to day, moreover, their own wages had been lowered. Single men, indeed, found it difficult to exist at all, no matter how willing, or how industrious; and married persons grumbled when they looked back upon the times when families received pay, not according to their earnings, but their necessities. Besides all this, the Kent Mercury told them, that if the farmers spoke the truth when they asserted that the land would not pay for cultivation, they were without excuse in not permitting portions of it to go into the hands of the poor. In one word, the labouring classes at Waltham began gradually to lose their relish for general sentences of condemnation fulminated against the aristocracy, and to suspect that there was a great deal of truth in the short but biting sarcasms which pointed to the poor man's enemies as moving in a sphere closer to their own.

Mr. Marshall had been the poor man's friend from the beginning; he was now more than ever prompt with the expressions of his commiseration. A regular attendant at the club, he not only never repressed the comments of those around him, but made a way for them. He was, however, a decided enemy to everything like outrage or violence. The poor were no match, at least such was his conviction, for the farmers, with the magistrate and the soldiers at their back; and therefore any attempt to rebel or strike work, whatever it might do in manufacturing places, must in Waltham end in increasing the general distress. No: his advice was, to annoy and pester the employers by every practicable means; since they were paid only half wages, to do only half a day's work; to marry as fast as ever they could; and so let the bull-frogs reap the fruits of their own narrow policy. And Mr. Marshall's recommendations were acted upon with great alacrity. Every day some instance occurred of a young man taking a wife, and coming within the week to the parish for relief; while, in exact proportion to the increase in population, was the decay of industry and every other rural virtue in the place.

The occupiers were not all so blind as to fail of observing these occurrences, nor so prejudiced as to miscalculate their probable results. The more violent politicians affected, indeed, to rejoice; for they were sure that the evil, when it rose to a height, would work its own cure. But in the vestry there was still a majority of reasonable persons who set themselves to the task of devising palliatives for a disease for which they despaired of finding a cure. A small farm, which happened at this time to become vacant, and of which the rents were paid to some charitable institution, was hired by the parish-officers. Thither it was determined that the surplus labourers should be sent; and as it was determined to cultivate the land entirely by the spade, hopes were entertained that not only would steady employment be found for the men, but that it might prove not absolutely profitless. Unfortunately, however, the plan was no sooner arranged, than it led to a system of dealing between the farmer and the labourer, which could not fail of increasing the discontent that already prevailed. Hitherto each occupier had been in the habit of keeping a certain quota of men, whom he employed as advantageously for himself as circumstances

would allow, but whom he never thought of absolutely dismissing. Now, the parish farm was regarded as a sort of resource against every emergency. Did a wet day befal, the farmer instantly discharged the whole body of his men, who, flocking to the overseer for relief, were by him transferred to the parish farm, where they worked in gangs. Nay, nor was this the worst of it.

Hitherto care had been taken to employ, as steady labourers, only married men with large families. The reverse became henceforth the practice, and for obvious reasons. To a married man with four or five children nobody thought of paying less than thirteen and sixpence a week. But a single man could be got for six, a married man without children for nine, and both the one and the other did as much work for his money as the father of the largest family. It was no longer the policy of the farmer to keep the large family out of his private resources, by giving to the head of it steady employ: on the contrary, as the parish paid for the labour of the farm at the very same rate with private individuals, it was much better for Mr. Amos to get his lands cultivated by single men, seeing that he saved one half

his previous outlay, without injuring any person except the parish. Thus was a scheme, devised with the best intentions in the world, perverted by mismanagement into the source of evil; while the consequences of bringing into gangs men fretful, idle, and therefore discontented, it required no gift of prophecy to foretel.

Such was the condition, political and moral, at which the parish of Waltham had arrived, when Giles Solley heard, to his amazement, the name of his brother Richard united, in a publication from the desk in church, with that of Keziah Sacket, spinster. From the period of his re-establishment at Crackstakes he had, on principle, kept very much aloof from his brother: for Giles, though a just, and in many respects a generous man, was somewhat stern in his moral creed; and the offences of which Dick had been guilty, more especially in robbing his mother, were such as Giles knew not how to forgive. To say the truth, likewise, Dick, either because his habits were unhappily fixed, or that he did not venture to look Giles in the face, came about Crackstakes as seldom as possible. Never, indeed, unless when driven to his last shift, would he apply to his brother

for work; and his brother either did not know, or did not choose to know, how he was circumstanced, till personally appealed to. It was to no purpose that their mother endeavoured, from time to time, to rekindle that love between them, which, when in such cases it once goes out, goes out for ever. Giles never refused his brother assistance when their mother applied for it, and permitted him occasionally to eat and drink under the roof where he was born, without complaining; but he steadily declined to treat him as he was treated of old.

"No, mother," was his constant answer, as often as Mrs. Solley threw out a hint tending to that consummation; "I can never consent to deal with Dick again as with a brother. The follies of youth might have been got over, the errors of manhood might have been forgiven; but to take to my heart one who brought you to the workhouse by an act for which his life was forfeited had you chosen to prosecute, that would indeed be to confound right and wrong with a vengeance. If Dick would consent to go to America, he should have the means, and welcome; for I confess that his presence here is neither creditable nor useful. But he shall never have it in his

power, either by his conversation or example, to corrupt his younger brother and sister: so never speak to me again about receiving him under this roof; for I tell you that, had I my own will, he should not darken these doors even as a visiter."

Giles Solley possessed all the stubbornness of his class and nation, and therefore his mother ceased to importune him; while Dick was left to take the very same chances that befel other young men about the place.

CHAPTER V.

FAMILY ARRANGEMENTS.

The parish of Waltham had for some time been in a feverish and unsettled state, when Giles Solley, to his indescribable horror and amazement, heard the curate one morning couple the name of his brother Richard with that of Keziah Sacket as affianced bride and bridegroom. Now Keziah Sacket was one of those loose characters that are to be found in almost all country places. She was already the mother of two children, which she had sworn to two different persons; and, unless report spoke with more than usual exaggeration, her habits were immoral and dissolute in the extreme. I have already said that between Giles and Dick Solley no cordiality subsisted. Nevertheless, the former still retained so much of natural feeling for his brother, as well as of regard to the good name of the family, that the idea of

such a marriage, as it had never entered into his mind as possible, so, when thus suddenly forced upon him, it affected him very deeply. He could scarcely sit out with common decorum the service of the church; and the moment it ended, he took up his hat and walked away. "Thank God, my mother was not here today!" was the first exclamation to which he gave utterance; "and I must go and see whether this mad step may not be arrested in sufficient time to save her from the distress which the bare rumour of it could not but occasion."

Giles hurried from the church to his brother's lodgings, at the house of a widow-woman, about a stone's throw from the village; but found, on arriving there, that Dick was absent. He had gone out early, and the widow neither knew whither he went nor when he might be expected back. Chagrined and annoyed at his failure thus far, Giles turned his face homewards; and, skirting the village, was conducted by a narrow pathway through the fields towards a small but notorious beer-shop, which stood alone beyond the reach of all observation, being far apart from every other dwelling. For among other measures designed for the relief of

the agricultural interests, and with a view to increase the comforts and blessings of the poor, I forgot to mention that the sale-of-beer act had been passed; one of those judicious operations of the legislature, which, seeking only to increase the public revenue, leave public morals to the mercy of private temptation. Giles was approaching this den of the worst description of vices, when he saw three men issue from the door,—one of whom turned off in an opposite direction, while two advanced to meet him. He was not slow in discovering that one of these was Mr. Marshall the grocer, while the other was Richard; and little as he felt disposed to hold converse with the former, his desire to communicate with the latter would not permit him to avoid them. It was evident enough that Dick had been drinking: still, his senses were not entirely stupified; so, when his brother saluted him, he returned the salute properly, and did not object to engage in a conversation, into which the other seemed anxious to draw him.

"I want a word with you, Dick," was Giles's address; "and I want to have it alone."

"Surely, surely," replied Dick; "I will

follow you directly.—Mr. Marshall, I dare say my brother has not a great deal to say."

"That depends on circumstances," answered Giles. "However, I have no wish to take you away from your friend, if there be any important matter under discussion."

"Oh! none in the world, I assure you," interposed Marshall: "we can settle our little affair at any time; for you, Richard, know where to find me whenever you are at leisure."

So saying, Marshall walked on; while Dick, wheeling round, trod step by step beside his brother, though with the air of one conscious that he is in communication with a superior who has just cause to be offended with him.

"You and Marshall seem sworn friends," observed Giles, after they had proceeded some time in silence; "I hope you find your associate as useful as he is agreeable; yet I think you would have been as well employed this morning in church as at that beer-shop."

"We had a little business of importance to transact," replied Dick, diffidently: "it is not a common practice of mine to spend Sunday morning in a beer-shop, nor of Mr. Marshall neither, I do assure you."

"Very likely," answered Giles; "nor is it any business of mine to inquire into your habits. But there is one act which you seem disposed to perform, against which I do think that I am entitled to protest, because it will affect the credit of your whole family, and of course mine and your mother's, as well as your own."

"Indeed! brother; and what may that be?"

"You are going to marry, I find; indeed, your bans were published to-day."

"Well, and why not? Am I not of age to judge for myself? Am I to consult you and my mother in this matter also?"

"I don't want you to consult me in anything, Dick; but I do want you to have a little regard to the credit of the name you bear. That woman would disgrace the family of the county hangman: you cannot, surely, intend to marry her?"

"I don't understand you."

"Not understand me! Come, Dick, don't equivocate; and, above all, don't palter with me. Your name was coupled with that of Keziah Sacket in the publication of bans: was this done with your sanction?"

"To be sure it was," replied Dick; "and devil take me if I understand what business

you have to interfere in the matter. Keziah may be all you represent her; but what then? Is it not quite right that the rogue and the —— should buckle together?"

"Look you, Dick," answered Giles sternly, "this is carrying the joke too far. A rogue you certainly have been,—the very worst description of rogues; for your own flesh and blood, the mother that bore you, and nursed you, and brought you up, was your victim. And if ever man deserved to hang, you did: but your mother and I both forbore to punish you, under the idea that at least you would not disgrace us further. If you connect yourself with that wretched woman, I shall almost regret that I ever abstained from pushing the law to its extremity: nay, I do not know that I shall not be tempted to bring the charge forward even yet if nothing else can stop you. And pray, supposing the woman were as respectable as she is the reverse, how do you propose to keep a wife?"

"Keep a wife!" answered Dick, in his turn waxing warm, and the liquor which he had swallowed obtaining a more decided mastery over him in proportion as that feeling prevailed; "why, exactly as I have kept myself, to be

sure, ever since you returned;—by the labour of my hands, whenever any kind stranger shall please to set me to a job; by parochial relief when no job is to be had. Keep a wife, indeed! D—n me! the parish which won't employ me as a single man shall keep both me and her."

"So you are one of those that intend to marry out of spite to the parish?"

"Ay, to be sure I am. And why not? It was only last Wednesday that Mr. Amos, your overseer, refused to take any notice of me because I was single; and is it not out of favour to him that I, and others in the same circumstances, have come to the resolution of getting wives? Zounds! the overseer shall never be without an excuse again in my case; on that I am quite resolved."

"Dick," answered Giles, with some difficulty controlling his temper, "let us discuss this matter calmly like brothers. You have no fancy for that vile woman—you cannot have any; and you are going to sacrifice your own peace, and the feelings of your family, in order to indulge a momentary fit of spleen against Mr. Amos? Why should you do this? Why not rather strive to put yourself again on good

terms with the world, and become what you once were, and leave behind you a name such as was left to you by your father. Thoughtless, weak, profligate, you have been; but even now it is not too late to recover, provided you abstain from hanging round your own neck a stone that must inevitably sink you."

"Giles," replied Richard, in some degree softened by the matter of this address, though not so much so as to fail of observing that the manner was scarcely in keeping,—"all that you say would be sufficiently just had I anything to fall back upon. Show me how I am to re-establish a character—tell me even by what means I am to earn a livelihood, and your arguments will have their due weight with me. But you might just as reasonably speak to the east wind, and forbid it to bring a blight, as talk to a ruined and a destitute man of recovering his place in society. Have I either a character or a home?"

"And whose fault is it that you have neither?" demanded Giles gruffly.

"Partly my own, partly yours, brother," was the reply, delivered in a dogged tone, though with great affectation of levity. "I

certainly threw my good name behind me, and you have taken especial care that I should never be in a situation to go back and look for it."

"Well then, Dick," exclaimed Giles, somewhat touched by this remark, "it shall not be so any longer. You shall have an opportunity of looking for your good name, and by a process too which, unless you be wanting to yourself, will be sure to restore it. What say you? are you disposed to emigrate?"

"What! go to America? No, brother,—not quite that, neither; and yet, God knows! there are few ties that bind me to this country."

"I ask again," demanded Giles, his sternness restored by this show of opposition on Richard's part, "are you disposed to emigrate?—because, if you are, I am willing and ready to pay your passage, to give you a trifle of money in your pocket, and to get for you what recommendations I can to persons who may be likely to lend you help in the New World. But, remember that I offer to help you thus on the express conditions, first, that you cast Keziah adrift at once; and next, that you enter into securities never to show your face again in this country."

"A most kind and brotherly proposal, I

must say," replied Dick, "and delivered in a tone every way worthy of the feeling that prompted it. Now mark me, Giles; I know your purpose in this perfectly. You want to get rid of me, that's all; and you don't care a straw whether it be by sending me to America or to the bottom of the sea. I conceive, therefore, that I owe you no thanks for the tender of your assistance. But I will tell you what I will do. Your proposition shall receive the most careful consideration. If, after I have slept upon it, I make up my mind to close, you shall either see or hear from me early to-morrow: if I determine not to close, it will be useless to return to the charge; for I can be determined when I like, as well as you; and, though I don't bully, I flatter myself that no one can accuse me of lack of courage. So, if this is all you wanted with me, I have given you my answer; and I suppose you scarce desire my company to Crackstakes?"

"I am not given to tell lies, even to serve my own purposes," answered Giles coldly; "and therefore I will not deny that you are pretty correct in your guess. I do want to send you out of this neighbourhood—not more because I would gladly take away from my own eyes a

living monument of follies past, than because I would keep you, if I could, from the danger of committing new follies, into which it is highly probable that you are going to rush. And so, as we perfectly understand one another, it would serve no purpose if I were to say that I did desire your company at Crackstakes. I hope, for your own sake, that you will communicate with me early to-morrow, and in the mean while I wish you good-day."

"Good-day, good-day!" answered Dick, turning sharp round upon his heel;—"good-day to my most conscientious and honourable brother. As to communicating to-morrow, that will be as it happens. However, good-day, good-day!"

Dick hurried off, as he uttered these words, in a long irregular trot; his pace giving sure evidence of the distracted state of his mind, and of the struggle which was needed to keep his passion from bursting forth. The motions of Giles, on the other hand, were deliberate and steady;—no incorrect emblem of a disposition which, as I have already hinted, with much in it that was noble and just, was become, in consequence of many different causes, stern and unbending. Neither the affected lightness

nor the real oppression of his brother's feelings had produced on him any sensible effect: his thoughts still brooded over the past delinquencies of the youth, and the probable misconduct of the man, till he had well-nigh reasoned himself into a persuasion that he was really taking unnecessary trouble in seeking to hinder this last act of folly and indiscretion. "What can it matter, after all,"—such was the tenour of his meditations,—"what a creature so lost to every sense of right and wrong either does or suffers? As to his family, he has already done to it all the injury that he can; and for himself—hang him! why should I or anybody else care what he suffers? Yet he is my brother, too;—ay, but what kind of brother? He was never to hold converse with Tom Overy again; and what did he do?—linked himself with the scoundrel in all manner of roguery; cheated his mother out of one portion of her property, plundered her of the remainder; brought her and his brother and sister to the workhouse,—and me, and them, and all connected with him, to shame. No, no,—curse him! let him do as he pleases;—I will trouble myself about him no more."

Such was the channel into which Giles's

thoughts had turned long ere he reached the door of his own house. When he entered the hall, therefore, he appeared gloomy, and his brow was clouded; and his mother, who had experienced considerable alarm in consequence of his unusually protracted absence, saw that all was not right with him. She hastened to inquire into the cause, and he told her without reserve.

"O Giles!" exclaimed she, while the tear stood in her eye, "I wish that I could persuade you to forgive that unhappy boy as freely as I forgive him. Remember that he is of your own flesh and blood; guilty, doubtless, and weak—yet still your brother and my son; and that if we entirely turn our backs on him, he can have no hope nor any desire to reform, either here or elsewhere. You are too strict in your dealings with him, Giles—indeed you are."

"Mother," replied Giles, "if I find it difficult to forget—for I deny that I have not forgiven,—but if I find it difficult to forget, it is on your account, not on my own, that my memory is so tenacious. To find you as I did—"

"My dear, dear son!" exclaimed the widow, throwing herself into his arms, "say no more

about that. What happened to me, happened for my good; and God Almighty, in sending you home again, even if you had come as a beggar, would have more than compensated to me for all that I suffered. Was it not a trial of my faith? and if I bore it as became me, why speak of it, except with thankfulness? But that poor boy! Oh that he were what he once was, innocent and respected!"

"Innocent, mother, he can never be;—no, nor respected neither,—at least here. And as to admitting him into the family, I am sure you do not desire that. There would be no peace within these walls, either for you or me, were he once admitted."

"Perhaps not," answered his mother; "indeed I fear not, for I see that he and you would not put it up: but at least some chance might be given him."

"Well, mother, he shall have a chance. I had well-nigh made up my mind to withdraw the offer which I made him this morning, of providing for his passage if he consent to emigrate. But I will not withdraw it. Nay, more, I will, if you desire it, take him upon the list of my steady men, and give him constant employ, on condition that he breaks off

at once both with Keziah Sacket and that villain Marshall. But as I know him better than you, I venture to predict either that he will reject my terms, or that, having agreed to them, he will act directly contrary within one week after our bargain is struck. Still, you will be gratified; and so long as that is the case, I, my dear mother, cannot but be gratified also."

The remainder of that day was spent at Crackstakes with even more than the degree of innocent happiness which usually reigned there. Giles, indeed, seemed to have gained a victory over his temper, and to rejoice in the idea of having done so; while the rest of the inmates, taking their tone from him, were glad, they scarce knew why.

CHAPTER VI.

CLOUDS IN THE HORIZON.

"Well, Dick," said Mr. Marshall to the younger Solley when, with flushed cheek and an excited air, he burst into the grocer's parlour, "what might that Solomon of a brother of yours want? if one may venture to ask."

"Oh, nothing in the world," replied Dick, "except, first, to put a stop to my marriage, and then to ship me off with as little delay as possible to America."

"To do what?" demanded Marshall.

"To ship me off to America. Don't I speak plain enough? To ship me off to America, I say—to America. Do you understand that?"

"Devil take me if I do! That Giles Solley, Esq. should be unwilling to have his pure blood contaminated by an alliance between his heir-at-law and a young lady of such humble pre-

tensions as Miss Keziah Sacket, I do understand; but why he should desire to ship you for America, it passes my poor wit to divine."

"Now, Marshall, if I did not know that you now and then could pretend to be ignorant of a thing or two, I should pronounce you a more decided noodle than people give you credit for. Don't you see that if I were once on the other side of the water, my tender-hearted brother would be relieved from all claims on my part, besides getting rid of a sight that constantly reminds him of the past, and makes his pride rankle? D—n me if ever I heard of such a proposal!"

"And you mean to close with it, of course?"

"Me!—no, by all that 's amiable! If I were without another motive for marrying Keziah, I should find one in the idea of vexing Giles: and when that is joined to the thought of spiting the parish, who could desire more?"

"You judge rightly, Dick,—depend upon it you do. America is a fine country, I make no doubt; it is the land of freedom: but America is not your country; and there is no reason why you or I should be driven away like convicts from the place of our birth, where there is such an abundance of good things scattered

about, were we only permitted to have our share of them."

"Ay, Marshall, there 's the rub! Plenty of good things, doubtless; but of what benefit are they to poor devils like me, who see, but dare not taste nor handle them?"

"I do think," observed Marshall, "that it is the hardest of all cases, that, in a country like this, there should be so much as one human being in a condition to say that he ever desired the necessaries of life, yet was unable to procure them."

"Hard! it is worse than hard. If we were either unable or unwilling to work, something might be said for it. But here am I, in the very vigour of life, begging for employment as if I were asking a kingdom; cringing before an overseer for leave to toil my strength out, and refused,—ay, and cursed and sworn at for asking. It is enough to drive a man mad."

"And to see the quantity of corn these men are hoarding up! Only look at their stack-yards and barns, how they groan with the weight of that food which is denied to you, and to thousands like you! It would be no bad job to set fire to one of these hoards: hang me if I would lend a hand to put it out!"

"I wish to God I saw that fellow Amos's premises on fire! I don't think he would find many hands forward to work the engines."

"But where's the use of wishing, Dick? If wishing would fill men's bellies and replenish their pockets, there would be neither a poor nor a hungry wretch in the world. Give me the man that has the courage to *do*, and I will show him how to do it both safely and surely."

"Will you, by G—d?" cried Dick. "I hate that ruffian,—I hate them all, Giles included,—so bitterly, that if I saw but a chance of escaping the gallows, I would go round the parish this very night, and fire every stack-yard in it. Only tell me how to set about it, and, d—n me, I am your man."

"Not now, Dick," replied Marshall,—"not now: you are heated with drink and your brother's conversation. You could not be trusted to-night. But don't allow the feeling to die away. You and all other poor men have the best right to be angry; and, take my word for it, you have no worse enemies than these bull-frogs. Just see how the brutes behave! They won't so much as employ threshers in the barns, but must have the work done with machinery. If I were a labourer, the

devil a threshing-machine would I leave unbroken in the parish."

"You say right, Marshall; by heavens you do! These threshing-machines are the cause of all our distress. Let us go out this very moment, and, getting some of the best fellows about us, let us begin at Sankey's, and smash the whole of them within a circle of three miles round."

Dick started up as he spoke, but was again restrained by his more cautious and calculating confederate. The latter immediately proved to him that to embark upon such an enterprise till after their plans had been fully arranged, would be to ensure defeat with all its consequences; whereas the exercise of a week's patience, and a judicious employment of the interval, could not but render success certain. But it was agreed between them that to sit much longer patiently under the burthens which were thrown upon the labouring classes, would indicate not only the total absence of spirit from among the people, but an indifference to the claims of moral justice. Neither were the friends less decided in the conclusion to which they arrived relative to the line of conduct which it behoved Dick, in his individual capacity, to follow.

He swore a solemn oath that he would hold no communication with his brother on the morrow; that the treaty of marriage between him and Miss Sacket should go on; and that he would meet Mr. Marshall by seven on the following evening at the same beer-shop where they had spent, with so much mutual profit, the greater part of that Sunday. Finally, one or two trusty individuals were named, with whom it was esteemed prudent to hold council; and this strange conference, if such it may be called, broke up: for Marshall had some other engagement to which he was obliged to attend; while Dick, repairing to the Anchor, spent there the little that remained to him of last week's earnings, and then, in a state of absolute indifference both to the pleasures and the pains of life, reeled home to bed.

I have alluded to the parish farm, to which all the unemployed married men were sent in Waltham. It was under the superintendence of a person hired for the purpose; one of those busy, gossiping, easy-tempered, plausible people, who make it their study to aim at the good opinion of their superiors, and very generally succeed. Will Watt was a bachelor of fifty, who, though not a native of the place, had

spent so many years in it, that he was now justly accounted one of its marked features. Inheriting some trifling property, he eked it out by working occasionally as a glover, by keeping the turnpike-gate, by acting as sexton, beadle, and collector of the poor-rates, and now by superintending the management of the parish farm. Kind-hearted and singularly obliging, Will had generally a word to say in favour of all that deserved it; and though too honest to speak well of such as would have belied his recommendation, he very rarely indulged in censure. To be sure, Will had about him no slight share of what passes current under the head of old-womanishness. He was a thorough gossip; knew all the tittle-tattle of the place; delighted in making himself useful; could mix a caudle, brew beer, nurse a child, and fat a pig, with any one in the neighbourhood; and, like honest Jack Falstaff, not only possessed a large portion of wit himself, but was the cause of wit in others. Moreover, Will was a great antiquary; could give you the history of every monument in the church; and, having cleaned and furbished them up with great care, delighted in nothing so much as displaying them to strangers. But the qua-

lities which secured for him the general esteem of his neighbours were, first, his incorruptible integrity; and next, a more than ordinary obsequiousness of manner. Such was the individual who shuffled his tall, spare figure every morning from the toll-house to the farm, in order to assign to each of the unemployed labourers his task, and who received from them at night, when what was called their work had ended, an account of what they had done, as well as the tools with which they had accomplished it.

For some time previous to the Sunday which was spent by Mr. Marshall and Dick Solley as I have just described, Will Watt had perceived symptoms of growing discontent among his men. They complained that the work to which they were put was worse than useless. The land, they said, had been dug over and over again, till it was on all parts of the farm as fine as saw-dust; and as no signs were afforded of cropping it, there appeared to be no end to the digging. Neither were they mindful of the cants which he set out for them. They would begin, indeed, while he stood by, to handle their spades and hoes lazily; but his back was no sooner turned,

than they laid them down; then, collecting into groups and gangs of a dozen or twenty, they either bandied one from the other some rude jests, or stood in close consultation, speaking in an under-tone, and gathering each man his brows like a gathering storm. Will had been so much struck with the threatening aspect of affairs, that he considered it his duty to make a report to the overseer, by whom it was received with the contempt which he was accustomed to manifest whenever danger formed the subject of his conversation. Nevertheless, Will, though silenced, was not satisfied; so he took the first opportunity of stating before the committee the nature of his own suspicions.

It will be borne in mind that, at the period to which my narrative refers, serious disturbances had already occurred in various parts of Kent. Misled by the common enemies of rich and poor, the labouring people had risen in several parishes, and, marching in force through their respective neighbourhoods, had broken to pieces the threshing-machines both of farmers and landlords. Nothing can be more easy, after men have had time for reflection, than to blame the supineness of

those in authority, and to say, that there needed but a moderate display of firmness at the outset to crush this rebellion in the bud. Doubtless all this is perfectly true: but let it not be forgotten, that the novelty of an evil gives to it an imaginary importance, which is for the most part much more appalling than need be. The gentlemen of Kent, for example, were so totally unaccustomed to witness any other bearing among their people than civility, that the display of its opposite appears to have paralysed them. They were completely at a loss how to act; so that the rioters, moving in open day from house to house, received not the slightest interruption; nor did any man seem to be aware that it was his duty to resist, even when they came to offer violence to his own property. Nor was the issue, however well meant, less mischievous than the previous proceedings.

The ringleaders in the riots being seized and committed to gaol the very day before the court of quarter-sessions met, passed, as it were, at once from the scene of their crimes to the place of trial: an admirable opportunity of striking terror into their associates, of which but a sorry use was made; for the magistrates,

conceiving that more might be done by lenity than by harshness, took from the culprits an acknowledgment of their fault, with a promise of better behaviour in time coming; and then, after an imprisonment of three days, dismissed them to their homes.

It is quite certain that the chairman, while passing this lenient sentence on the rioters, assured them that the bench acted under an impression that they had been misled; and gave them full warning, that if ever they, or any others of their class, came before him again under similar circumstances, he should deal with them very differently. It is equally certain that the deluded men heard this threat without believing that the gentlemen on the bench possessed power to carry it into execution. An opinion, on the contrary, got abroad, that to break any number of threshing-machines would subject the perpetrators to no more than three days' imprisonment. Still, for a fortnight or three weeks, there was a sort of calm throughout the country, not unlike to that which, in tropical climates, is said to precede the tornado. The unthinking, or the very sanguine, were, however, the only description of persons who affected to be-

lieve that it would continue; and Will Watt, whatever his failings in other respects might be, did not belong to either class.

"You may say just what you please, Mr. Amos," observed Will, when the committee was assembled, and as yet none of the paupers had been called in; "I tell you there's a shocking bad spirit among the men; and unless something be done to disperse them, and give them regular employ, I won't be answerable for the consequences."

"Just like you, Will," answered Mr. Amos with a sneer; "frightened at your own shadow. A capital hand at managing sick old women, but quite unfit to deal with healthy men!—A bad spirit among them! Curse them, I know there is!—there's a spirit of idleness and profligacy, which we must put down, or by G— they will put us down!"

"Well, mind, I've told you; and if anything does happen, you can't blame me. It's my belief, that if things continue as they are another week, you will all hear of it."

"Then they shall not continue as they are!" replied the overseer fiercely. "No, d—n them! since they are dissatisfied with the treatment they get, they shall receive such as *I*

think they deserve. It is perfect extravagance to pay these people at the rate we have been doing. Twelve shillings a week are more than any labouring man can spend; I am quite sure it is more than any labouring man earns; and as to those lazy rascals on the farm, I will not pay one of them more than nine shillings."

"No, no, Amos!" exclaimed his fellow-parishioners; "that won't do to-day, at all events. The men went to the farm with the understanding that they were to get twelve shillings; it will never do to cut them down without warning."

"I suppose, gentlemen," answered Mr. Amos, "when you put me in office as overseer, you saddled me with the responsibility of managing the poor, and of being accountable for my mode of management. Now, as I hold it to be my first duty to save the public money in every way that I can, either I must be permitted to choose my own course, or to resign."

"Good God!" cried Giles Solley, "you don't mean to begin your system of reduction to-day? The people have had no warning, and you hear they are already discontented. Is it your intention to stir up rioting in Waltham also? I tell you, there is grumbling enough about

your treacle-beer, and other twopenny-halfpenny savings, in the house; and if you carry the same spirit without-doors, we shall probably all live to repent it."

"Are you white-livered also?" cried Mr. Amos: "I thought the general of King Baboo's armies had learned to overcome his fears."

"I am no bully, certainly," replied Giles; "though perhaps I may have as good courage as my neighbours. But I will tell you what I have which some of them have not—bowels of compassion for the poor. How are a man and his wife, and half-a-dozen children, to keep soul and body together on nine shillings a week?"

"To be sure, a man must have prodigious bowels of compassion who permits his own brother to become chargeable to the parish," answered Mr. Amos with a sneer. "But that is neither here nor there: I tell you plump, that I will pay no man this day more than nine shillings; and I fancy that this meeting has neither the power nor the will to pay more. What is it to me how they live?—I have only to consider what they earn."

"Then I for one," said Giles, "will not sit here to give my countenance to acts of such

gross oppression. If the men had fair warning, the case would be different; though even then I should not approve of the plan. But to encourage in them expectations all the week, which you are going to disappoint at the end of it—I will not be a party to any such trickery."

Giles rose, took his hat, and quitted the room; and was, after a little scene of angry discussion, followed by the rest of the committee. There remained, therefore, only Mr. Amos, Will Watt his assistant, and the master of the workhouse; when, the door being opened, the men were required to enter one by one. The first that came held out his hand to receive his pay, and nine shillings were placed in it. He turned them over, counted them, turned them over again, and then desired to know what this was for.

"It's your week's pay, to be sure," replied Mr. Amos.

"No, master, not quite that," answered the man; "my week's pay comes to twelve shillings, and here be only nine."

"Your week's pay may have once come to twelve shillings; but as long as I am in office no man shall receive more than nine shillings for doing nothing."

"What! reduce our pay too!" exclaimed the man. "D—n me, we can't stand that! Don't you mean to give us the other three?"

"I have told you what I mean to do," answered the overseer; "and you know that I never say one thing and do another. You have got your money—you may be off."

"Off with that! No,—blow me tight if I do! You may keep your nine shillings and be d—d; I'll go to Colonel Hamilton and see what he says to it."

So saying, the man threw down the money on the table, and flung from the room. A like result attended the applications of five or six more; several of whom threatened, while one went so far as to throw out a hint that Mr. Amos might be a monstrous fine fellow, but that he was not a match for a whole parish. Meanwhile, without in the waiting-room there was a clamour of voices, as if Bedlam had broken loose. "We'll serve him out for this yet; we'll see whether he is to tyrannise over us! Let him look to his threshing-machine. He got it spick-and-span new only last summer; we advise him to sell it cheap to anybody that will bid for it."—On Mr. Amos, however, all this threatening produced no effect: it seemed indeed but to con-

firm him in his determination; for, opening the door, he stood in the midst of them perfectly undaunted.

"I tell you what it is, you d—d scoundrels!" cried he; "if you choose to take your money, I am here to give it; if not, I desire that you will go about your business, and feed your families the best way you can."

"We will take what we used to get, and forget all," exclaimed several voices.

"You shall not take what you used to get," replied Amos; "and as to your forgetting or not forgetting, that is a matter of no moment to me. I am not to be bullied like some others, and you know it."

"You'll repent this, Amos," shouted some one in the middle of the throng. "That smart machine of yours can be broken as well as other people's."

"Very likely," answered Amos; "but let me see the man that will try to break it: he shall have a bullet through his body first, as sure as my name is Amos."

"Curse your bullet, and you too!" exclaimed several voices. "But never mind now, men. Let's be off to Colonel Hamilton's and see what he will do for us. If we don't suc-

ceed there, then we must try some other method."

"Hurrah, hurrah for Colonel Hamilton's!" Then with loud shouts the whole body rushed from the workhouse, and were soon seen marching in good order right through the village towards the residence of the magistrate.

CHAPTER VII.

DISSATISFACTION.

WHILE these strange scenes were enacting at the workhouse, Giles Solley pursued his way homewards, with a mind only partially withdrawn from the pressure of private cares by a consideration of the probable consequences to the parish from Mr. Amos's obstinacy. For his brother had not kept the appointment which had been made for the previous day, and Giles naturally concluded that the marriage, which it was his object to prevent, would go forward. That idea again brought with it the prospect of increasing annoyance from day to day,—of a colony of disreputable connexions springing up about him, which he could neither notice nor get rid of. It may be that Giles's residence abroad, even at the court of an African chief, had sharpened his feelings as to points

about which few men in his station give themselves the smallest concern; or perhaps nature had endowed him with a morbid sensibility, which the pride of an honourable descent tended to increase. At all events, whatever the cause might be, as to the effect no doubt could exist. Giles would not countenance a brother who had brought upon his family the disgrace to which Dick's misdeeds had exposed his own; yet he fretted himself to death lest the very brother whom he had cast off might marry a woman of bad character and settle near him.

Such was the bent of Giles's meditations, when a loud shout, rising as it seemed from the vicinity of the workhouse, caused him to look back. He had gained the summit of a little eminence along the brow of which ran a hedge, and, standing near a gate, was enabled to take in a large extent of country. He saw the men, to the number perhaps of sixty, hurrying towards the village; and, fearing he scarce knew what, was on the eve of returning, when some one overleaping the gate, rubbed shoulders with him. He turned round, and beheld his brother Dick, evidently as little pleased with

the rencounter as he seemed prepared for it; for Dick's dress was that of a man who had been up all night, and engaged in some laborious employment. His gaberdine was wet; his shoes and leggings were muddy; and he carried over his left shoulder a bag of which the contents seemed bulky, and his right hand grasped a formidable-looking bludgeon. The brothers stared at one another without speaking; and the younger made a movement as if to proceed, when Giles detained him.

"I expected you all yesterday," said he, "but you never came. Is it that you have determined to reject my proposal, or what else am I to understand?"

"Whatever you please, brother," replied Dick, resting his burthen on the gate, "except that I have no particular fancy for going to America."

"And you *have* a particular fancy for taking to wife the most abandoned woman in the parish."

"That's my own concern, Giles."

"Dick," said Giles, somewhat softened without knowing why, "it is impossible that you can have any love for that woman; and I pray

you to consider whether you will better your condition by linking your fate with one whom neither your mother nor I can ever notice."

"I do not expect to better my condition," replied Dick bitterly: "I believe, indeed, that nothing could make it worse; but as to bettering it, that is quite out of the question. No, I don't marry for love; but you yourself know that it has come to this,—a man must either marry or starve."

"Indeed, brother, I know nothing of the sort. On the contrary, you will find, when you reach the street, that the fact of being married will no longer entitle you, or anybody else, to increased parish-pay. Do you see that crowd of people there?—these are the men from the farm, all of them married, but all cut down in their pay, this very morning, from twelve shillings to nine. Whether do you think that you will be best off with six shillings as a single man, or with nine as a married man?"

"But you forget, brother, my bonny bride has a little fortune of her own. Five shillings a week is some help to a man in these bad times."

"With two children to keep out of it. By heavens! Dick, the levity with which you speak of

marrying the mother of two such children sometimes makes me doubt whether the same blood flows in your veins that runs through mine."

"You must ask our mother that question, Giles," was the reply. "In the mean while, as I am in a hurry, and want to know what all that hullabaloo is about, I must wish you good morning."

"Stay one moment, Dick. I would fain save you from taking a step which you will never cease to repent; I would fain put you in a way of redeeming your character, if that be possible; and could I see a chance for you here, even here I would establish you. But you know your own weakness; you know that you have no more power to withdraw from bad associates, or to deliver yourself from bondage under one cunning knave or another, than you have the power to work a miracle. Would it not be prudent, therefore, to try your fortune elsewhere? I recommended America because it is a new country, and report speaks favourably of men's chances there; but if you dislike going so far, why not go to sea? I had a short trial of the life, and I assure you that it is a pleasant one; or if all

other resources fail, try to be to me what you once were, and I will act fairly by you to the best of my ability."

"I have no fancy for the sea, Giles; and if I had, I am too old to learn a seaman's duties: and as to your last proposal, it comes too late."

"Have you made up your mind to be cast off entirely, with your wife and your amiable step-children, both by your mother and me?"

"Giles," said Dick bitterly, "there is no use in throwing out such a threat as that. What am I now? Is the countenance which I receive from you of the smallest use to me? Can I so much as go to Crackstakes for a day's work when I want one, without first of all petitioning my own flesh and blood as I would a stranger? Is my seat, my old familiar seat by the fire, kept vacant for me, or my bed in the garret made up as it once was? I am cast off already; and what worse will my condition be after than it was before my marriage?"

"There are two ways of telling every story, Dick," was Giles's answer, delivered in a sterner tone. "It was not I that cast you off; it was you that rendered yourself unworthy of

the treatment of a brother at my hands. One who by his extravagance ruined himself,—who robbed his mother and brought her and her little ones to the workhouse,—has no great right to reproach his brother if he refuse to take him under his roof: you may thank the connexion that is between us for saving you from transportation at the least."

"Then let me go my own way, and do you take yours," replied Dick, with difficulty suppressing his fury: "we have wasted too much time already in this useless chat. You would not transport me by due course of law,—oh no!—because that might reflect disgrace upon yourself; but you would be extremely happy if I could be persuaded to transport myself. D—n it, Giles, there is no vice, after all, so mean as hypocrisy; and with that, at least, no man can charge me."

Dick flung his sack over his shoulder, grasped his cudgel tightly, and moved forward. Giles seemed to hesitate for a moment, but immediately afterwards made up his mind. He allowed his brother to pass on; and in a few seconds each was considerably advanced in an opposite direction from that pursued by the other.

While the elder brother pursued his way homewards, scarcely satisfied with himself, and full of indignation towards Dick, the younger, maddened by what he taught himself to regard as the ungenerous conduct of his nearest of kin, ran, rather than walked, with troubled strides in the direction of the street. He saw the crowd when he gained a particular angle, just as its rear was passing the mill-dam; and the shout with which the people seemed to take leave of the villagers inflamed him with a strong desire to join them. It was, however, necessary, first of all, to get rid of his burthen; so he hastened to Marshall's, and, entering by the back-door, cast down the load on a table in the washhouse. He then shouted for Marshall, who, having a customer to serve, could not immediately attend, but who joined him as soon as possible.

"You seem in haste, Dick," said he; "what may you be after now? can't you wait a bit and tell me how it fared last night?"

"Not now," answered Dick; "I 'll be back again by-and-by: the men are all marching Lord knows where, and I want to join them."

"Pooh! is that all? Then take my advice and stay at home. They are off about

a matter with which you have no concern, and in which, if you take my advice, you won't mix yourself up. I venture to prophesy that they will return just as they went; and then we shall be able to make use of them for our own purposes."

"What is it that they are about, then?"

"Oh! only going to Colonel Hamilton's to seek redress against Amos. He has lowered their pay, it seems; and the simple fools imagine that the magistrate will interfere to increase the expenses of the tenantry. They will find out their mistake ere long, that you may depend upon."

"Hang it, I should like to be of the party too. There is something in the shout of men that always raises one's spirits, and makes one forget one's cares: I think I must go too."

"You must not, Dick. Be content where you are. Why should you be anxious to make yourself a marked man, when there is no occasion for it?—and why should your cares press more upon you to-day than yesterday?"

"I have just parted from that sweet brother of mine, and we have had a breeze. D—nation! it makes me mad to think that

he *has* a right to throw such things in my teeth, and that I cannot give as well as take."

"Oh! that's it, is it? Well, well, never mind; rather be thankful that he cannot now go further. In the mean time, how did matters go last night? Was the look-out good? You succeeded, I perceive? But was there no skirmishing?"

"None whatever. A little trouble managed all; but there was no appearance of danger."

"Bring the bag up stairs, then. I am just going to dinner— stay and take some with me; and by the time we are done, the people will be back from Hamilton's, and then we shall know how they sped."

Dick yielded to the reasoning of his friend, and they adjourned to dinner. It is not at the noon-day meal that persons in the humbler classes of society ever commit an excess; neither were Marshall and his guest tempted, on the present occasion, to forget themselves. The former indeed was constitutionally a temperate man, and the latter found no inducement to behave intemperately; nevertheless, they lingered at table long enough to effect Marshall's purposes, inasmuch as the noise of many feet and a hubbub of voices beneath the window

assured them, before the meal was finished, that the paupers were returned. Dick sprang from his seat and looked out. There they were, sure enough, not now advancing in regular column with measured tread and an air of defiance, but straggling and disorderly, as men are wont to be who have sustained some defeat, and are as much exasperated as discouraged by it. Dick did not linger long at the window; but, running down stairs, was soon in the heart of the throng. The first whom he addressed was a man remarkable throughout the parish for his great industry and determined temper.

"What has happened, Wall?" cried Dick.

"Happened! Nothing but what we had a right to expect. The gentlemen are all linked together to oppress us poor men; and it has come to the point where I all along thought it would end: we must either take care of ourselves, or see our wives and children perish."

The sound of Wall's voice, which had not been heard during the whole of their progress homeward, drew towards him and Dick Solley half-a-dozen of the most resolute of the crowd. They surrounded the querist; and, happy in the opportunity of making their case known to one who seemed to be in ignorance, they began

with excessive volubility to instruct him. Meanwhile Mr. Marshall, as if attracted by mere motives of curiosity, came and stood at his shop-door, without, however, appearing anxious either to provoke discussion, or to deliver any opinion of his own. "We went, you see," exclaimed several speakers at once, "to Hamilton's, though Wall told us from the first that we should get no redress. Well, up we goes to the hall-door, and rings the bell. A servant opens, and we desires to see his master. Next comes the Colonel himself; and he says, says he, 'What's all this about, men? what do you want coming in such a body to my door? This is a downright riot: I can't suffer a mob to collect here; but if any of you have a complaint to make about anything, let him come into my justice-room, and I will hear him.'

"'We have all a complaint to make,' answered Wall; 'and if your worship pleases, we should like to make it where we stand. The overseer has robbed us all, and we want redress.'

"'How robbed you, my man?' says the Colonel.

"'By lowering our pay,' says Wall. 'We've been working on the parish farm ever since last

Thursday; and when we came to receive our twelve shillings, he offered us only nine.'

"'What have you earned?' asks the Colonel; 'what was your week's work worth?'

"'I know nothing about that,' says Wall; 'I only know that we have never got less nor twelve shillings before, and now we're cut down to nine.'

"'And have you taken the nine?' says he. 'No, to be sure not,' says Wall. 'What use would nine shillings be to me, with a wife and seven children?'

"'There you were wrong, my man,' says the Colonel. 'If you be paupers on parish pay, you ought to have taken whatever the overseer offered; and if that was not enough, then you might have come and asked an order for further relief. But I can't interfere to regulate the amount of wages in a parish: you must go back and take the nine shillings, if you can now get them; and then, if any one of you think himself aggrieved, let him return to me: but observe, I will hold no communication with a disorderly mob.'

"'And is this all we've got by way of redress?' says Wall.

"'All that you shall get from me, at any

rate,' says Hamilton. 'Whatever may be the real merits of your case, you have put yourselves in the wrong by your mode of bringing it forward.'

"'You are all alike,' says Wall,—for he spoke up to the justice like a man;—'there's not one among you that cares whether a poor man live or die. I for one will never take the nine shillings—I will sooner starve first; and if my neighbours follow my advice, they will do so likewise.'

"'Look you, friend,' says the Colonel, 'I advise you to mind what you are about. You have acted as spokesman on the present occasion, for which no harm shall befall you; but the tone in which you are pleased to address your comrades cannot be forgotten: I recommend you to take care of yourself. And you, my lads, go back and take the wages that are offered: at present I can give you no better advice.'

"'Now then, friends,' says Wall, turning round and speaking to us, 'hear me:—The man that forgets himself so far as to cringe to Amos for his paltry nine shillings, is a mean, spiritless slave; he does not deserve that we should hold any conversation with him, and I, for one, declare

that I will never speak to him again. But for the rest, I tell them, that if they be only true to themselves and to one another, we may see this matter out yet.'

"Lord! if you had heard the shout we gave! It was no use the Colonel trying to speak again; we would not listen to him; but, after giving him three groans, away we marched homeward; and here we are now, ready to follow Wall wherever he chooses to lead, and up to anything."

"There's Mr. Marshall," interposed Wall at this stage of the conversation: "he's the poor man's friend; let us consult with him."

"Really," replied Marshall, "I do not know what to say: your case is the cruellest I ever heard of,—hang me if it isn't! Oppressed by the overseer; deserted by the magistrate; refused work, which is all done by machinery; and sent home, cold and hungry, to your starving families;—it's enough to rouse you into any enterprise. However, it's no use consulting while your blood is hot. Come you, Wall, by-and-by, to the Anchor, when we can consider the case leisurely; and get rid of the men as soon as possible: half of them are not to be trusted, you may rely upon it; and if

they were, they are too numerous. You and Dick and I will talk this matter over, and see what may be done."

Mr. Marshall's proposition received the approval of the parties to whom he addressed himself; so Wall retired home sulky and despounding, and the others betook themselves, some to one public-house, and some to another.

END OF THE FIRST VOLUME.

LONDON:
PRINTED BY SAMUEL BENTLEY,
Dorset Street, Fleet Street.